







# THE SONG OF SONGS



*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

REGINA, OR THE SINS OF  
THE FATHERS

JOHN THE BAPTIST

THE INDIAN LILY

THE UNDYING PAST

# THE SONG OF SONGS

BY HERMANN SUDERMANN

A NEW TRANSLATION BY BEATRICE MARSHALL

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY JOHN LANE



LONDON: JOHN LANE THE RODLEY HEAD  
VIGO STREET

MCMXIV

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## THE PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In 1898 I published a translation of Sudermann's "Der Katzensteg," under the title of "Regina"; in 1906 of "Es War," under the title of "The Undying Past," and in 1908 of "Der Täufer," under the title of "John the Baptist." All these books were translated by Miss Beatrice Marshall, and the translations were received in England, America, and Germany with enthusiasm alike by critics and the public. I was therefore naturally anxious to publish Herr Sudermann's great novel, "Das hohe Lied," on which he had been working for a great number of years, but I found that Mr. B. W. Huebsch of New York, the well-known American publisher, had purchased the world rights in the translation. My only chance therefore was to purchase from him the translation he had had made, and thus I acquired in sheet form, as he had already copyrighted the book in this country. My edition of the work appeared here in October, 1910, under the title of "The Song of Songs."

Serious objections were then raised to it in certain quarters, and I should like to place on record here exactly what happened and in proper sequence, by first of all printing a letter which I wrote to Sir Melville Macnaghten, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard; a circular letter which I sent to the book trade; and a circular letter which I sent to the Incorporated Society of Authors and the following well-known novelists, together with such replies as I received:

E. F. Benson  
Mrs. W. K. Clifford  
Sir A. Conan Doyle  
Sir Gilbert Parker

Eden Phillpotts  
G. B. Shaw  
Miss May Sinclair  
Thomas Hardy

Miss Beatrice Harraden  
A. E. W. Mason  
H. G. Wells

Miss M. P. Willcocks  
Israel Zangwill

London, W.,  
*December 9th, 1910.*

Sir Melville Macnaghten,  
Criminal Investigation Department,  
New Scotland Yard, S.W.

DEAR SIR,

I am told that Inspectors Lawrence and Duggan called at my office to-day to inform me that complaint had been made of "The Song of Songs," by Hermann Sudermann, which was described as an obscene book. Through ill-health I have not been at my office for several weeks, although I happen to be in London to-day on my way to Brighton; but my manager immediately came to me and communicated what had passed. The officers informed him that you do not associate yourself at the present juncture with the opinion that has been expressed upon the book, but that their object was to draw my attention to the fact that complaint had been made.

I very much appreciate your kindness in causing the officers to call upon me, and they were quite right in their assumption that I should be the last person to wish to publish an obscene book. Although I am under doctor's orders, I have delayed my departure for Brighton to write letters to some of the most distinguished novelists of the day and to the Society of Authors, to whom I am sending copies of "The Song of Songs," asking them to acquaint me with their opinion, at the same time informing them of what has occurred. As soon as I receive their views, I shall be guided by them in my action and will inform you of my decision. I presume that this action on my part meets with your approval,

Yours faithfully,

JOHN LANE.

PS.—I enclose a copy of my letter to the authors.

I feel I must add a personal word of thanks to you for your consideration in this matter. You will, I am sure, see my position. I am dealing with the reputation of one of the greatest literary figures in Europe, and it is absurd for me to assume the rôle of judge, especially as you do not associate yourself with the—to me—anonymous accusation. It is all the more difficult from the fact that this same translation has been sold in tens of thousands in the U.S.A., where the reading public is much more prudish than here.

London, W.,  
*December 9th, 1910.*

DEAR SIR OR MADAM,

For some weeks I have been laid up with a serious attack of bronchitis, but I am fortunately in London to-day, although not at my office, on my way to Brighton.

I have just been informed that Inspectors Lawrence and Duggan, from the Criminal Investigation Department, have called to-day at my office, saying that a complaint has been made against Hermann Sudermann's novel, "The Song of Songs," which was published in Germany under the title of "Das hohle Lied." It is described as obscene, but the officers assured my manager that the Chief Commissioner does not at the present juncture associate himself with this expression. They explained that their call is to draw my attention to the fact that a serious complaint has been made, so that if the Public Prosecutor takes action I shall not be able to say that, had I known the book to be objectionable, I should immediately have withdrawn it. The book has been read by the Officers of the C.I.D., for so they told my manager. The translation is by an American, and it was printed in America, where it has been in circulation for many months past, and has been one of the most successful books of the year. I am writing to the Chief Commissioner, informing him that it is my intention to lay the matter

before the Society of Authors and the most distinguished novelists of the day, whose advice I am ready to take. I am therefore sending you a copy of the book in the hope that you will find time to read it in the course of the next few days and let me know your opinion, and I shall certainly be guided by the consensus of opinion.

I am,  
Yours very truly,  
JOHN LANE

PS.— May I suggest that this is a question for the consideration of the Council of the Society of Authors ?

London, W.,  
*December 10th, 1910.*

DEAR SIR,

Yesterday morning I received a call from two inspectors from the Criminal Investigation Department, who stated that complaint had been made about Hermann Sudermann's "The Song of Songs," which was described as "an obscene book." The police declined to express any opinion of their own, but warned me of what had occurred.

I immediately wrote and thanked the Chief Commissioner for his courtesy. I then wrote letters to the principal novelists of the day, asking their advice, for I could not myself sit in judgment upon one of Europe's greatest writers. In the meantime I have withdrawn the book from circulation.

It is only fair that I should put the trade in the possession of all the facts of the case. I took the book in good faith. I had seen that it was for months the best-selling book in America, the most puritanical of all countries. I should just as soon have thought of changing the text of Shakespeare, Ibsen, George Meredith, Mr. Hardy, Mr. Maurice Hewlett, and Mr. George Moore. I must give the trade the option of returning the book.

JOHN LANE

7, Chilworth Street,  
Paddington, W.  
*December 14th, 1910.*

DEAR MR. LANE,

The book is very outspoken and occasionally nasty, but I shouldn't call it obscene, and the reputation of the author is your justification for publishing it. Personally, I think the first half brilliant and the last half tedious and unpleasant. A great many authors not nearly so famous as Sudermann could write a somewhat bald catalogue or series of risqué episodes. It is a book, in my opinion, for the student of literature and the mature, certainly not for the young person; but the student, I take it, would be able to read it in the original.

I am,  
Yours sincerely,  
LUCY CLIFFORD.

Windlesham,  
Crowborough,  
Sussex.

DEAR SIR,

Many thanks. I read the book with great interest. To say it is ever "obscene" is an abuse of words. That there are passages which are coarse, and unnecessarily coarse, is on the other hand indisputable. I should not like any woman under forty to read it. And yet it is not written for the purpose of being coarse, and that is the essential point.

Yours very truly,  
A CONAN DOYLE.

Max Gate,  
Dorchester.  
*December 15th, 1910.*

DEAR MR. LANE,

I am sorry to hear that you have been bad up with



*bronchitis, and hope that you are on the way to health again.*

I finished reading last night the translation of Sudermann's novel, "*Das hohe Lied*," that you sent me a few days back. I am not in a position to advise positively whether or not you should withdraw it, but I think that, viewing it as a practical question merely, which I imagine to be your wish, I should myself withdraw it in the circumstances.

A translation of good literary taste might possibly have made such an unflinching study of a woman's character acceptable in this country, even though the character is one of a somewhat ignoble type, but unfortunately, rendered into the rawest American, the claims that the original (which I have not seen) no doubt had to be considered as literature, are largely reduced, so that I question if there is value enough left in this particular translation to make a stand for.

Believe me,

Yours very truly,

John Lane, Esq.,  
The Bodley Head.

THOMAS HARDY.

3, Fitzjohn's Mansions,  
Netherhall Gardens,  
Hampstead, N.W.  
*December 17th.*

DEAR SIR,

Many thanks for your letter and the copy of "*The Song of Songs*."

I read the book carefully several months ago. I consider it to be a most wonderful book, and should deeply regret to see the work of so great a master as Sudermann suppressed in England. It is an absorbing psychological and physical study; and I see nothing obscene in its frank presentment of a woman's life, given over, it is true, to passion, and yet with a thread of finer aspiration

clearly and continuously to be traced throughout the course of her career.

I am,

Yours very truly,

BEATRICE HARRADEN.

17, Stratton Street, W.

MY DEAR LANE,

I have now read the "Song of Songs." The translation is obviously an undistinguished piece of work ; and possibly it adds here and there a coarseness which the original book is without. As to that I cannot speak. Herr Sudermann is no doubt outspoken to the point of brutality, but with his theme brutality is the better way. Pruriency is the bad way ; and with that he has never had anything to do. That the "Song of Songs" might offend some people I can understand. That it would do any harm I cannot.

Yours very sincerely,

A. E. W. MASON.

Riviera Palace Hotel,

Monte Carlo.

December 30th, 1910.

DEAR JOHN LANE,

Please pardon the delay. I've been seedy, and have not written a single letter for ten days. I'm all right again, and am sending to tell you briefly what I think of "The Song of Songs."

I can see no reason why it should be banned, tho' to my mind it is lacking in the essentials of that Art which makes all things possible if not expedient. There is no real tragedy in the life of a *born* prostitute such as Lilly was, and certainly there is no comedy. There was never for an instant a problem for her to solve, and all the effort to present a struggle is vain and empty. She went her accustomed course like the fly-away she was, and that is what the book shows with very remarkable photography

and in a light which reaches into every corner. It isn't a sweet book, but *Salome* isn't a sweet drama, and to attempt to ban the one and let the other go is sheer stupidity and crass prejudice. One divorce case in the grimy Weeklies is more lurid and pornographic to the impressionable eye than all this book of masterly observation and graphic literature. The Public must set the standard, not the Censor, and as one of the Public I resent any attempt to regulate my diet.

Yours truly,

GILBERT PARKER.

Torquay.

December 22nd, 1910.

DEAR JOHN LANE,

I have read Sudei nann's "Das hohe Lied" very carefully, and if I were inclined to be flippant should say the only things obscene therein were the Americanisms of this translation.

But in truth there is more to be said.

I consider that in spirit the book is not obscene, but inasmuch as many of the characters are obscene, because the artist has been making a study of certain obscene-minded human beings, then it follows that, as a true artist, he has created an atmosphere of obscenity for those persons to move and breathe in. You do not ask for a criticism of the book, and I should not presume to offer it if you did (being happily without the least itch ever to criticise anything or anybody); but upon the one point where you invite opinion I would say the book is obscene, as it was artistically bound to be, because it offers a picture of an obscene corner of society—a society entirely preoccupied with the sexual man and woman hunt. It is not obscene in the sense that many lesser novels written in all countries are obscene.

I hope that I make the distinction clear as it exists in my mind.

Very faithfully yours,

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

10, Adelphi Terrace, W.C.  
*December 20th, 1910.*

DEAR JOHN LANE,

At your request I have read the American translation of Hermann Sudermann's "Song of Songs." There is no reason why you should not publish it except the risk that you may be prosecuted. But as it is impossible for an English publisher to conduct his business without running that risk daily, I presume you will not allow it to deter you.

The book is a fictitious biography of a *femme galante*. It is not the sort of book that is given as a prize in a girl's school, though I am by no means sure that it would not be more useful than many of the books that are put to that use. It says what ought to be said about its heroine without any of the sentimental lasciviousness and avoidance of the unpleasant side of clandestine gallantry which makes most of our novels so dangerous to young people. Sudermann is blunt, frank, and contemptuous, where the English hack-writer would be furtive, inferential, discreet, and superficially decent. He strips the romance off Bohemianism ruthlessly, and takes care that if you are curious about the sort of life that is open to a woman who has lost her position in respectable society in Berlin, you shall know the truth about it. Not that he attaches any false consequences to it for the sake of an edifying moral. His heroine does not starve, does not jump over the bridge, and fares better than most ugly, honest, and hard-working women as far as her circumstances are concerned. She is left at the end of the book in a position which many respectable English families would be very glad to see their daughters in. The author makes no attempt to flatter society by denying or hiding the fact that immorality pays a penniless girl who is pretty and amiable better than morality, and that it even leaves her a better chance of being married than the drudgeries and disfigurements of singing The Song of the Shirt. But that it damages her soul cruelly and incurably he brings out

mercilessly. He deliberately leads you into all sorts of foolish sentimental sympathies with her, only in the end to bring you the harder up against Dr. Johnson's opinion of her. She is left, as such women often are left, with an adoring husband, a luxurious income, and everything the most virtuous heroine could ask from British fiction, but hopelessly damned all the same. You need not fear that anyone who reads the book will envy her or be tempted to go and do likewise. It is worth adding that what began the mischief with her was having nothing readable within her reach except popular novels which made everything that tempted her seem poetic and delightful and honorable, and were therefore not suppressed by the censorship.

You will understand from the above account why you have been threatened with censorial proceedings for proposing to publish this novel. Instead of baiting the trap, it shows it to you shut, with the victim inside. That, our library censors and their dupes will say, is disgusting. Precisely. Do they ask Sudermann to make it attractive? The attraction of the book lies in the interest of the picture it gives of the phase of contemporary society with which it deals. It is full of vivid character-sketches which not only amuse us as we read but give us a whole social atmosphere to reflect on. If the reflections are bitter and even terrifying, serve us right: it is not Sudermann's business to keep us in a fool's paradise. The suppression of this book would not only be a deliberate protection of vice—which is always best served by turning off the light—but the reduction of every English adult to the condition of a child under tutelage. But even if the book were as false and mischievous as any of the romances which make the same theme agreeable and seductive I should object to its suppression all the same. No harm that the worst book could possibly do even if people could be forced to read it against their wills could be as great as the intellectual suffocation of the whole nation which a censorship effects. If Germany may read Sudermann and we may not, then

the free adult German man will presently upset the Englishman's perambulator and leave him to console himself as best he may with the spotlessness of his pinafore.

Yours faithfully,

John Lane, Esq.  
The Bodley Head,  
Vigo Street, W.

G. BERNARD SHAW.

4, Edwardes Square Studios, W.

*December 13th, 1910.*

DEAR MR. LANE,

I've waited before writing to you till I had finished "The Song of Songs."

I have read every word of it carefully, and I think it would be a national disgrace if so fine a work of so great a master were suppressed.

The book is powerful and sincere and absolutely moral in tendency and intention. Of course it is a terrible subject and there are bound to be terrible things in it, things that I, personally, dislike extremely; but I see that none of these things are insisted on for their own sake. None are unnecessary, except, possibly, the violent scene in Kellermann's studio, and *that* would not really do anybody any harm.

Judging the book as it ought to be judged—by tendency and intention—I cannot find anything in it to which the adjective used by the complainant could apply. It is a long and elaborate work, and the "terrible things" are comparatively few and far between. They offend my taste, but not my moral sense—*that* remains appeased by the tragedy of it all, as in "real life."

I would even say that from the point of view of morals and the portentous young girl, the book should do good, should act as a deterrent by its ruthless analysis of "Schwärmerei," by showing where it leads and what it is stripped of its dangerous glamour.

Altogether I see nothing to justify complaint. As for

criminal prosecution—we are ridiculous enough, as it is, in the eyes of our neighbours !

Faithfully yours,  
MAY SINCLAIR.

17, Church Row,  
Hampstead.

MY DEAR LANE,

I have read "The Song of Songs" very carefully. I find it unsympathetic work ; there is a harshness and hardness about Sudermann's effects that I do not like and that reminds me of the exaggeration of wrinkles and blemishes one finds in over-focussed photographs. None the less it is a very sincere and able piece of literature, and I cannot understand anyone who is not suffering from some sort of inverted sexual mania wanting to suppress it. It deals with sexual facts very plainly but without a suspicion of pornographic intention, it presents vicious tendencies and their indulgence in an extremely deterrent way, and I cannot imagine anyone not already hopelessly corrupted who could gain any sexual excitement from reading it.

Yours very sincerely,  
H. G. WELLS.

Exeter.

DEAR MR. LANE,

The morality of a novel depends upon three points :—(1) Subject ; (2) Purpose ; (3) Treatment as to detail.

(1). The subject of "The Song of Songs" is that of a girl ruined by an old roué and then bandied about from man to man till every trace of soul is gone. She has no existence apart from the lowest passion. The book is a tremendous indictment of the idea, only now beginning to disappear, that a woman should live for the sole purpose

of gratifying a man sexually—whether in marriage or otherwise.

(2). In aim it is certainly not impure in the sense that it paints a career of vice as alluring. The girl is living in hell and is at times aware of it. The sordid misery of her life is there, though—and here Sudermann differs from English writers—she never becomes an outcast physically. She has always a certain well-being and even beauty. The ruin and destruction wrought is of brain and soul, a much more terrible matter.

(3). In treatment as to detail the book stands condemned; the pictures given are not only revolting, but painted with entirely unnecessary fulness. There is a cruel gusto, for instance, that places the book on a far lower level of morality than "Madame Bovary." The thought of the novel is feeble compared with its physical atmosphere. But in the matter of detail, on the whole the difference between English fiction and ALL continental work is one purely of fashion. Our people in English novels sin vaguely: in continental novels they sin garishly. It is the difference between a dream and a cinematograph. But for the law to interfere in England with books touching on vice is supremely ridiculous, since our law, framed entirely for man's convenience and not at all for woman's protection, is one of the greatest means by which vice itself is kept flourishing. The farce of police supervision and the insults of the English law sin against morality fifty times more powerfully than any of Sudermann's novels.

My opinion is that all sane, healthy-minded women ought to read novels like this, because they ought to know the truth, the entirely accursed truth about these things. For the ignorance of women is the chief reason why other women like the heroine of "The Song of Songs" are left to rot in body and mind. It is to men that such books are injurious, for they are so written that the vicious details strike their eye first, and the cruel pleasure taken in them would appeal to the worst



in men. It is only women and somewhat exceptional men who would see the horror of degradation that Sudermann depicts the heroine as enduring. It is hell to a woman, but to the average stupid man it would simply appear amusing.

Such books should be labelled "For Women Only." There are comparatively few naturally vicious women, and these "The Song of Songs" won't injure, for they are beyond that. The others will be benefited by its knowledge. As to whether this book should have been published, I think it is six to one and half a dozen to the other: you will enlighten women; you may possibly injure some young men. But at the present moment the essential thing is that women should have their eyes opened. That is, indeed, the task of this century; the next will see the results of it.—good ones, I firmly believe.

M. P. WILLCOCKS.

Far End,  
East Preston,  
Sussex.

*December 12th, 1910.*

DEAR LANE,

I am very sorry to hear of your illness and of the trouble that the police may give you. Unfortunately, I am far too busy at present to spare time to read a book of 640 pages, and unless one read it all one might miss the impugned passages or the other passages which justify them. I readily, however, corroborate your view—although no corroboration is needed—that the high position of Sudermann in European literature must raise any work of his far above the plane of police interference. His motives are sure to be ethical, and he must not for a moment be confounded with those mercenary scribblers who spice their wares for the market. Indeed, if I were a publisher, I would never even read an MS. of Sudermann's

beforehand. I should put it into the hands of the printers in blind faith, as no doubt you have done.

With best wishes for your rapid recovery,

Yours sincerely,

ISRAEL ZANGWILL.

It will be seen that although the consensus of opinion was in favour of the circulation of the book, yet there was a very strong objection to the translation. I therefore wrote to Herr Sudermann as follows, at the same time sending him copies of the correspondence---

To Hermann Sudermann, Esq.,  
Berlin.

The Bodley Head,  
London, W.  
*February 8th, 1911.*

DEAR SIR,

You will probably have heard that I have had difficulties over the publication of "Das hohe Lied," which was translated by an American for Mr. Huebsch, the New York publisher who has the translation rights of your book, and from whom I bought it in sheet form for the British market.

On December 9th, Sir Melville Macnaghten, Director of the Criminal Investigation Department, sent two of his representatives to my office, informing my manager, in my absence through illness, that serious complaints had been lodged against the book as being obscene. I immediately wrote letters to Sir Melville Macnaghten, to the Incorporated Society of British Authors, and to our leading novelists; and I am sending you copies of the correspondence, as I am sure that many of the replies will give you great pleasure. I had, however, no satisfactory answer from the Society of Authors, although one would suppose it the duty of a properly constituted society of that nature to defend or at any rate support your case. Had I had the least support from them I should have

defended your position with an assurance of victory for the book, but as the matter stood I did not feel justified in allowing your artistic reputation to be at the mercy of a British judge and jury. The verdict might have been an insult to literature. In any case the position would have been most undignified for an author of your eminence.

The failure of the Authors' Society to take up your case must not be confused with the opinions of our leading novelists, for I should explain at once that the only qualifications for membership are the publication of any book or even pamphlet and, of course, the subscription of twenty-one shillings per annum. It is not therefore a society of any distinction, though it happens to include among its thousands of members most of the eminent writers of the day.

Our most distinguished realist novelist, Mr. George Moore, in writing to the president of the Society on this occasion, says—

"I once belonged to the Society of Authors, but I seceded from it because it seemed to me to have entirely dissociated itself from literary interests; but I do think that the opportunity has come at last for the Society of Authors to justify its existence. A better opportunity than Sudermann's book will not be found."

After much consideration I have come to the conclusion that all interests would be best served if you could obtain permission from Mr. Huebsch for me to have the book retranslated by Miss Beatrice Marshall, whose versions of "Der Katzensteg," "Es War," and "Der Täufer" met with your entire approval. The present translation is fraught with Americanisms and has been made without due regard to the genius of the two languages and the prejudices inherent in the English character.

I feel bound to give you all these particulars so that you may appreciate my reasons for withdrawing the book in a manner least calculated to do harm, and for

appealing to you now for help to place the book before the English public in a form which will be acceptable to your numerous friends and admirers in this country.

Yours very truly,  
JOHN LANE.

His reply was as follows—

Mr. John Lane,  
Publisher,  
Vigo Street, London, W.

DEAR SIR,

Please accept my sincerest thanks for your kind letter and your detailed account of the suppression of my novel "The Song of Songs" (Das hohe Lied). Naturally I can only look forward with pleasure to the possibility that this work, to which I have devoted years of unwearied artistic care, should not be lost to England, and so I gladly follow your advice to persuade Mr. Huebsch, the American publisher, by my own personal intervention to resign the English rights to you. I have at the same time written to him, and I enclose a copy of this letter for your kind consideration.

That I am heartily grateful to my English colleagues for their kind sympathy requires no assurance on my part, but I beg you, dear sir, when you meet one or the other of them to convey to each my feeling of deep appreciation.

In conclusion, permit me to hope, dear sir, that your health, which at the time you wrote was not good, has been completely restored.

With expressions of my highest esteem for your services in this matter,

Believe me,

Yours sincerely,

HERMANN SUDERMANN.

In conclusion, I had better say that on receiving Herr Sudermann's reply and from Mr. Huebsch his consent,

I entered into negotiations with Miss Beatrice Marshall for a new translation of the book, which is now offered to the public with every confidence that it will meet with a wide and enthusiastic reception. I should like too to add my thanks to the various writers who responded to my circular letter with such readiness and sympathy.

JOHN LANE.

The Bodley Head,  
Vigo Street, London  
1st May, 1913.

## PART I



# The Song of Songs

## CHAPTER I

**W**HEN Lilly was just fourteen her father, Kilian Czepanek, the music-master, suddenly disappeared. He had been giving lessons all day as usual, cursing the heat—which was terrific—and drinking seltzer water and moselle in the intervals. Now and then he had rushed into the dining-room to snatch a cognac and arrange his disordered tie. He had playfully pulled Lilly's brown, flowing curls, as she sat pondering over her French verbs, and then vanished again into the drawing-room, where pupils came and went and only discords and curses went on for ever.

Contrary to his custom, he had not reappeared in a fury, with a tremendous appetite, after his last unfortunate victim had strapped up his portfolio and slammed the front door behind him. Instead, Czepanek had stayed where he was. He neither whistled nor wept, nor gave vent to his rage on the keys of the piano, as he was sometimes in the habit of doing when the day's work was over. No sounds of any sort, except a deep-drawn groan, proceeded from the other room.

Lilly, who was greatly interested in everything this handsome papa of hers did or did not do, let her French grammar slide from her lap to the floor, and crept to the keyhole. Through it she saw him standing before the long mirror absorbed in self-contemplation. Now and again he raised his left hand and pressed it with a gesture of despair to the silken, dark artist locks, which mamma tended regularly every day with bay-rum and French brilliantine.

There he stood glaring fiercely at his reflection, his cheeks flushed and damp, his eyes rolling wildly, and Lilly's heart went out in admiring love to her idolised papa. This was not the first time she had seen him pose before the glass; she knew the attitude well. It was his way of conjuring up once more the life he had missed and the loves he had lost; that



grand vanished world where all the duchesses and prima donnas never ceased to think of their lost favourite with longing and regret. Like an elderly Cupid he stood there, with little bags under his eyes and a budding corpulency apparent in his person. Both mamma and Lilly coddled and spoilt him with unremitting care and never-tiring enthusiasm. They regarded him as some gorgeous bird of paradise, which happy chance had captured between four walls—a bird that it was their duty to exert strenuous efforts to keep in its cage.

Lilly, by rights, should long ago have been seated at the piano; for in the house of Czepanek silent keys were considered a shameful waste of time and an unpardonable sin. She had to practise four or five hours daily. Often, when her father in the throes of creative inspiration forgot the time allotted to his daughter's practising, she did not set to work till nearly midnight. Then she would sit half frozen, with heavy eyes, swaying on the music-stool till dawn. Lilly's mother had found her many a time in the small hours, her head pillowed on her arms, which were stretched out on the keyboard, wrapt in a profound childish slumber. Such hardships gave Lilly a distaste for the career of artist, for which her father's ambition destined her. She preferred, to serious study, getting up on her own account forbidden polkas out of old albums, the brilliant but incorrect performance of which drove her father distracted. But this evening her lesson was to be on the Sonata Pathétique, and that, as everyone knew, was no joke.

For this reason she was thinking of breaking in on her father's introspective meditations, when she heard the door of the other room open. Lilly, with a bound, deserted the keyhole and ran into her mother, who was carrying up the supper things on a tray. The prematurely sunken cheeks of the lady of the house were flushed from the heat of the kitchen fire. She held her lean figure proudly erect, and the once beautiful eyes, which gnawing conjugal disappointments had converted into dull, restless slits, there was something like a gleam of joy and expectancy; for to-day she entertained high hopes that the result of her culinary skill would appeal to her husband's appetite and put him in a good temper.

The sound of plates rattling, as the table was laid, brought papa to the door between the two rooms, and his head, with the sunlight playing round its halo of frizzy dark hair, appeared.

"Heavens! Supper-time already!" he exclaimed, and cast up his eyes with a peculiarly wild expression.

"In ten minutes," replied his wife, and a smile at the thought of the surprise dish that awaited him hovered about her dry chapped lips like a delectable secret.

He now came into the room, and breathing deep and hard he said, with an effort as if speaking hurt him:

"I've just been looking at my portmanteau. The strap is in two."

"Do you want your portmanteau?" asked mamma.

"It should always be ready in case of emergency," he answered, and his eyes wandered round the room. "A man may be summoned at any moment to this place or that, and then it's well to be prepared."

It was true that, the winter before, a Berlin pianist who had agreed to appear on tour in the next town had been detained by the snowing up of his train, and the committee had telegraphed to Czepanek to take his place. But, in the height of summer, the probability of such a thing occurring again was more than remote.

"I'll send Minna to the saddler's with it directly after supper," said his wife, as usual taking care not to contradict her irascible husband.

He nodded a few times, lost in thought; then he went into his bedroom, while mamma hurried to the kitchen to put the finishing touches to the dainty dish.

A few minutes later he reappeared carrying the portmanteau, which seemed rather full. He paused in front of the linen-press.

"I was going to try, Lilly dear," he explained, "whether the score would fit into the bag. You see, if one had to go to rehearsals later——"

The score of "The Song of Songs" was kept in the linen-press, being a handy place for the family to rescue this priceless treasure in case of a fire breaking out when papa chanced to be away.

Lilly looked round for the bunch of keys, but mamma had taken it with her to the kitchen.

"I'll go and ask for the key," she said.

"No, no," he exclaimed hastily, and a slight shudder passed through him.

Lilly had often noticed that he shuddered when the conversation had anything to do with mamma.

"I'll run over to the saddler's myself."

Lilly was horrified at the idea of her famous parent going on his own errands to a common little shop.

"Let me," she cried, reaching out her hand for the bag, with the intention of saving him the trouble. He pushed her away.

"You are getting too old for that sort of thing now, little girl," he said. His eyes rested with satisfaction on her tall, girlish figure, already developing the soft rounded curves of womanhood. "You are quite a signora."

He patted her cheek, and fidgeted a moment with the lock of the linen-press, his lips compressed into a bitter line; then, with a half-alarmed, half-sneering glance towards the kitchen—Lilly knew that glance too—he went quickly out of the room—went never to return.

The night that followed that rosy summer evening was never to fade from Lilly's memory. Her mother sat by the window, in a cotton dressing-jacket, and looked up and down the street with anxious, feverish eyes. Every foot-fall on the pavement made her start up and exclaim: "Here he comes!"

Lilly knew that it was all over with her Sonata Pathétique for this night at least. A feeling of depression prompted her to appeal to her dear St. Joseph, to whom she had always confided all her small troubles since her confirmation. Many an hour had she passed in St. Ann's before his altar, the second chapel in the right aisle, dreaming and musing, as she gazed up into the kind old bearded face, and sighing without reason. But now his consolation failed her utterly, and she gave up the quest, disappointed and baffled.

The last cab was heard in the streets at midnight. At one the footsteps of passers-by became rare. Between two and three nothing was heard but the shuffling footsteps of the night-watchmen echoing through the narrow alley. At three, market waggons began to rumble, and it became light. Between three and four Lilly made a cup of boiling hot coffee for her mother, and herself ate up the cold supper, for which waiting and weeping had given her a ravenous appetite.

It was nearly five when a string of belated young revellers went by, kissing their hands to the watching woman at the window, thus forcing her to withdraw. They then started

a serenade in their pure clear voices, which Lilly, in the midst of her trouble and anxiety, appreciated. The singing was good, and devoid of the pedantic tricks that her father abhorred. Probably these youths were pupils of his, who had failed to recognise his house.

No sooner had they gone than Lilly's mother resumed her post at the window. Lilly struggled hard not to allow herself to be overcome by sleep. She saw as through a veil her mother's scanty fair hair ruffled by the breeze, her sharp pointed nose—reddened by crying—turning first to the right and then to the left at every sound, her dressing-jacket flapping like a white flag, her thin legs crossing and uncrossing perpetually in nervous excitement. She was told to relate the story of the portmanteau and the linen-press for the fiftieth time, but her eyes would not keep open. Then suddenly she sprang up with a shrill cry. Her mother had slipped down in a dead faint, and lay like a log on the floor.

## CHAPTER II

**K**ILIAN CZEPAANEK did not come back. Of course, there were kindly-intentioned friends who said they had always foreseen it would happen; indeed it was a wonder that a man, so divinely gifted, with the brand of genius imprinted on his stormy brow, could have endured the trammels of convention as long as he had. Others called him a scamp and a good-for-nothing, who corrupted innocent girls and led young men astray. They considered Frau Czepanek lucky in being rid of him, and advised Lilly to pluck her father's image from her memory. Worst of all were the people who held their tongues, but sent in bills.

Frau Czepanek pawned or sold all the little articles of luxury belonging to her bourgeois youth, and every present that her husband in moods of sheer wanton extravagance had lavished on her. These soon came to an end, and furniture, dress, and linen—all save absolute necessities—followed. Then at last the duns were satisfied.

The choral society, which Kilian Czepanek had conducted for fifteen years, and which under his *régime* had won no less than half a dozen prizes, expressed its appreciation of the decamped conductor's services and talents by holding the post open for six months, and paying the widow a half-year's salary. But this gracious grant came to an end also. And then began the heart-sickening begging expeditions to the houses of local magnates and wealthy residents in the town; the timid pulling of front-door bells, and scraping of feet on strangers' door-mats; the long, anxious waiting in shadowy halls and ante-rooms; the sitting down on the extreme edges of chairs; the sighing, stammering petitions, accompanied by wiping of eyes, meant to be sincere yet sounding all the time hypocritically mercenary, and failing to make the intended impression.

Next came the hunt for work in shops and factories where sewing was given out—depôts of sweated industries where cheap *lingerie* was turned out by the gross, cheap lace sewn on to cheap nightgowns and chemises, and the whole galvanised for use by the addition of buttons and buttonholes, ribbons and tapes.

Now followed the period of eternal grinding at the sewing-machine, fingers covered with needle-pricks; inflamed eyes, swollen knees, vinegar and brown-paper bandages for fevered temples; the stewed tea at four in the morning; the sweet diluted coffee, warmed up three times, the so-called bread-and-butter instead of the midday roast meat, and the evening eggs—in fact, the period of wretchedness and approaching destitution.

And, strange as it may seem, the further the day on which Kilian Czepanek had vanished receded into the past, the more surely did the forsaken wife count on his return. The six months had passed, and a new conductor was appointed to challenge comparisons with the old. For a fortnight the newcomer was annoyed by flattering eulogies of his predecessor in the provincial press. Then these too ceased. Oblivion followed, and the man who had so mysteriously disappeared seemed to be almost entirely forgotten. Only in a restaurant-bar here and there, or a girl's heart, did his image linger. But the wife, who at first had bitten her lips in silent anguish when his name was mentioned, now began to talk of his return as an assured and long-planned future event.

What was more, she became vain again, she who in the course of married life had let her youthful prettiness and sprightly gaiety—all that he had married her for—pass under a cloud, and had fretted and worn herself to a shadow by needless self-reproaches and anxieties. After not having decked her shrunken breast with ribbon or jewel for years, or curled a lock of her straight hair, she screwed and scraped out of her meagre earnings something to spend on powder and cosmetics. When she could hardly stand for tiredness, she would paint her thin lips, and at eight o'clock in the morning come to the sewing-machine from the kitchen hearth with a freshly frizzed fringe covering the forehead that she had before allowed to get higher and balder every day.

Thus she prepared for the moment of reunion. Rouged, and adorned like a bride to meet her bridegroom, she would

hold out her arms to meet the repentant profligate. For it was certain he must come back. Where else would he be greeted with a smile of such perfect sympathy as hers, where else find the understanding soul whose silence is consolation and whose prayers bring peace and happiness? Would there be anywhere else one who without complaint or regret slaved for him body and soul, and submitted, as she did, to be taken or left according to his whim?

So it was that she had given herself to him when she was a fair young laughing thing, careless and unsuspecting. Without conditions she had let him take her, simply because it pleased him. She had not regarded it in the light of a just recompense when her father, an honest attorney, had insisted on his leading her to the altar, a measure which had saved him from being ostracised by the whole town as a seducer. She had only cared to know that she was happy, and had not the slightest presentiment of the consequences of her gentle yielding. She accepted what came uncomplainingly, as the natural cost of the gift he had bestowed on her in himself.

He would come back; whether he liked it or not, he must come back. Did she not possess something that linked her to him for all times, something that he was bound to cross her threshold to claim? Not Lilly! No doubt he loved his child, loved her with tenderness, and took delight in her outward and inward charm. Yet she was but a toy to amuse him in his idle hours; in his vagabond heart there was no place for a steady paternal love. Even in hours when he felt most lonely and depressed, he would never have dreamed of seeking solace in the company of a child. The tie was something that bound him closer to her than their child. It was a roll of music in manuscript, and that was all. It would have been easy enough for him to stuff it into the portmanteau on the day that he had started on the memorable journey. He had indeed thought of doing it, but at the last, in his eagerness to seize the moment of escape without again facing his suspicious wife, he had forgotten everything else.

This roll of manuscript contained all that had been his anchor during the fifteen years of stagnation in a narrow middle-class groove, all that had linked his future with the fiery aspirations of his youth and the glorious hopefulness of his adolescence. Slender as it was, this roll of manuscript embraced his whole life's work. It was his "Song of Songs."

As long as Lilly could remember, nothing in the world had ever been spoken of with such bated breath, such reverent awe, as this composition, of which no one save Lilly and her mother knew a single note. It was something as yet altogether unknown and undreamed of ; it opened out new realms of sound, inaugurated the beginning of a musical development destined to rise to mystic heights and be lost in the clouds of the unattainable. It embodied the Art of the future as represented by oratorio, opera, after reaching its culmination in Wagner, having descended into abysmal depths, and the symphony no longer meeting the demands for regeneration in modern music. Oratorio was to accomplish this, not in the old exploded wooden form which pandered to an outworn ecclesiasticism, but in the new world of harmony introduced by "The Song of Songs." The score had been completed years ago, and laid aside. It would have been sacrilege to entrust its rendering to the tender mercies of provincial performers, so there it lay and rusted, unperformed. It shed beams, unseen but felt, of hope of a golden future into the grey present. It filled a child's heart with such ecstasy, devotion, and love, that it would rather have ceased to beat than be deprived of this source of noble and exquisite dreams on which it nourished itself daily.

For Lilly, those sheets, held together by an indiarubber band, lying in the top drawer of the linen-press, were like sacred relics, which radiated and sanctified the household. She revered and adored the scrawl of curly-headed black notes, and her earliest recollections were bound up with the melodies they expressed. Lilly's papa, however, objected to his sublime motifs being dragged into the light of common day, and when he caught wife or daughter humming them he would tell them to sing things more on their level. In time there was no need for his remonstrances. Mamma gave up singing altogether, and Lilly withdrew into herself. When she was alone in the house she amused herself by making a kind of drama out of "The Song of Songs," and acting it before the glass. She arrayed herself in sheets and muslin curtains, braided her hair low round her brow, and adorned it with tinsel pins. Then she declaimed, danced, laughed, and cried ; went down on her knees and posed in passionate attitudes, acting Solomon's bridal rhapsody, which papa had made live again, after a lapse of twenty-five hundred years, in his great masterpiece.



And now that the master had left his manuscript behind him on his disappearance from the house, it became more than ever the keystone of his family's hopes and longings. It was conceivable that he, Bohemian to the core, might cast off his wife and child, emulating the example of his own parents, who had turned him out into the streets at a tender age. But it was not conceivable that he should do anything so preposterous as weakly abandon the great work of his life, the weapon with which he might conquer the world.

So the manuscript of "The Song of Songs" reposed in the drawer of the linen-press, which had been saved from the wreck when Frau Czepanek and her daughter moved to a humble attic, where the sewing-machine continued to hum and whirl day and night. Here, as a symbol of coming reunion, it spread a miraculous influence around it ; while the deserted wife became more withered in face and gaunt in form, and paint could no longer conceal her projecting cheekbones or the hollows beneath her haggard eyes.

## CHAPTER III

**I**N these days Lilly bloomed into a tall, well-developed girl, who carried her satchel of books through the streets to school with the air of a princess. She was generally dressed in a green plaid woollen frock much cockled from rain, which, despite perpetual letting down, always remained too short. Her feet were shod in a pair of down-at-heel and worn boots. She wore woollen gloves, which, pull them up as she would, left below her sleeves a hiatus of bare slender red arm.

No one who saw her swinging down the street, with her easy graceful carriage, a picture of radiant health and youth, with her vivacious small head—too small for her tall figure—set on a long sternlike throat rising from broad shoulders, her white and rather prominent teeth beneath her smiling short upper lip, and with those eyes, afterwards known as “Lilly eyes”—no one noticed the poverty of her dress, or suspected that those erect, delicately formed shoulders stooped for hours over a sewing-machine. Who could guess that this magnificent young frame, with the vigorous blood coursing visibly through it, prone to blushing and paling without cause, was reared on salt potatoes, stale bread, and bad sausage?

The college students went mad about her, and the verses written to her in the lower school were legion. Lilly was not indifferent to their boyish homage. When she saw a batch of students coming towards her in the street, her eyes grew dim from self-consciousness. When they saluted her—for she had made their acquaintance on the ice—she felt dizzy and ready to sink through the earth to hide her blushes. But the sensation felt after such meetings was quite lovely. She recalled for hours with delight the face of the boy who had greeted her most courteously, or the one who had blushed as

rosy red as herself. He was her chosen cavalier till next time, when she fell in love with another.

In spite of her numerous admirers, her school-fellows did not torment her as much as might have been expected. There was an innocent defencelessness about her which made it impossible to be her enemy. If her satchel was hidden, she only said, "Please, don't," and when the girls perched her on top of the stove, she sat there and laughed, and in addition to letting them copy her English exercises she did their sums for them. The only trouble was jealousy among her bosom friends, who flew at each other's throats on her account, for she was fickle, and dropped old friendships to take up new with an ease which startled herself. She could not help responding to every fresh overture of friendliness made to her.

With her masters, too, she was popular. The rebuke, "Lilly, you are dreaming again," that came sometimes from the dais, had no sting, but a tone of playfulness in it. And when she was a new-comer, and had sat at the end of the sixth row in Class I, B, more than one hand had stroked her brown head with paternal fondness.

Her nickname was "Lilly of the Eyes." Her school-fellows declared such eyes were uncommon to the point of being uncanny. They had never seen eyes like them. Sometimes they called them "witch's eyes," sometimes "cat's eyes." They said their colour was violet, and some were sure she darkened the lids with a pencil. However that might be, to look at Lilly meant looking at her eyes, and not caring much to look at anything else.

Lilly went into the advanced class, called "Selecta," when she was fifteen and a half, for it had been settled that she was to earn her living as a governess. This was a great change; everything was different—teachers, girls, lessons, and friendship meant a different thing. You were not called by your Christian name. There was no throwing of paper pellets and going home to find blotting-paper in your hair. Much was said about "the sacredness of vocation," of "noble living," and consecration of life to work, and at the same time there was no end of chatter about love affairs and secret engagements.

Lilly felt for the first time in her life a little envious. She was neither engaged nor had she any love affair to boast of. Anonymous presents of flowers, with verses signed "Thine

for ever," of course didn't count. But in time it came. Love began to dawn in an imaginary atmosphere of marble statues and pillars, of dusky cypresses and eternally blue skies; it was the adoration of a schoolgirl for a master, and the longing to be a benefactress to the adored one. He was the assistant science-master, and taught in the junior school, where knuckles were rapped with the ruler and tongues thrust out in retort. He did nothing in the higher school, but he gave lectures to the young ladies of the Selecta on the history of Art. The very name of "Art" fills the budding soul of a young girl with ecstasy; how much more intense then was the sentiment when Art was associated with an interesting young man of delicate health, with deep-set burning eyes, and a snow-white brow—a young man who was called Arpad?

Here romance ended. What remained behind it was a poor consumptive young fellow who had painfully accomplished his university career by private tutoring, only to be doomed to an early grave at the moment that he hoped to reap the fruits of his drudgery. The authorities did the best they could for him. They gave him easy work, and when they saw the hectic flush on his cheek they supplied his place and sent him home for a term. But this could not last, and, feeling that he was becoming a burden to the staff, he strove by suicidal efforts to show himself still capable of working. He volunteered to undertake all sorts of duties outside his province, and what men in health shirked he with one foot in the grave cheerfully took on his shoulders.

Lilly never forgot the day on which the principal brought him into the Selecta. It was between three and four, and the last lesson was in progress. The stout figure of the principal was closely followed by the slim, rather handsome young man with a slight stoop, who had stood during prayers in the big hall at Fräulein Hennig's side, and turned down the leaves of his book while the hymn was being sung. He wore a tight-fitting grey frock-coat, which revealed the lines of his emaciated figure, and a fashionable silk waistcoat that gave a false impression of the world to which he belonged. He made a series of abrupt military bows and appeared shy and embarrassed.

"This is Dr. Mälzer," said the principal, introducing him. "He will initiate you ladies in the art of the Renaissance.

I hope you will pay particular attention to the subject, which, though not obligatory, and one you will not be examined in, is of the greatest importance to general culture, and by-and-by will accelerate your progress in the study of Lessing, Goethe, and Winckelmann."

The principal, with these words, retired, leaving the young lecturer nervously tugging at the blond moustache, the thin ends of which drooped on either side of his mouth. A half-sarcastic, half-shy smile hovered about his lips. He looked uncertain whether he should sit or stand on the dais. Meta Jachmann, who was always inclined to be silly, began to giggle, and set half the class giggling too. His transparent face flushed. In a voice which, weak as it was, shook his whole narrow person, he said :

"Yes, ladies, laugh. You can afford to laugh in your position, for life lies before you full of possibilities of endeavour and attainment. I too may laugh over the privilege of being allowed to address you soul to soul. That does not often fall to the lot of a man at the outset of his teaching career. You will soon experience for yourselves what a happiness it is."

The whole class became quiet as mice, and from that moment onwards he held it spellbound.

"But my good fortune does not end there," he went on ; "the authorities of this institution have been generous enough to place such confidence in my poor abilities as to entrust me with a theme that is the noblest in existence. Till the Renaissance, every thinker in history, no matter how much a revolutionist and free-lance at heart, has been made by the interpretations of history to play to the gallery in the personal expression of his ideas. The sages have labelled Plato as a mere shield-bearer of Christianity, Horace as a pedant, and Jesus as the Son of God ; but no one has attempted to show Michael Angelo, Alexander Borgia, Machiavelli in any other light than that of an ego defying the world and relying on its own power in its lust for creative or destructive activity."

The pupils pricked up their ears and listened. They had never heard anything like this before. They felt that he was talking out his life's blood, and at the same time that this established a tie of protective freemasonry between him and them. He continued in bold, rapid outline to draw vivid pictures of the men and period, making dead bones live.

What had long been repressed and dammed up within him poured from him now in passionate eloquence. His hearers realised that this was something more than an ordinary school lesson, more even than the fruits of ripe scholarship. It was a confession of faith, and they hung on his lips with all the abandon of woman's enthusiasm for what she doesn't understand.

Lilly, being a younger pupil, sat close under the dais, and she felt vaguely as if a vast flood of new melody was floating over her head ; music having always played the supreme part in her life and imagination, pictures and thoughts came to her first through the world of sound. She grew pale, and gazed up at him in dawning appreciation. Through a mist of tears, her handkerchief crushed into a ball in her hand, she saw the nervous heaving of his chest, the drops on his forehead, the burning excitement that flamed in his cheeks, and she longed to laugh and cry together, to call out " Stop ! " But, as she couldn't do this, she sat motionless, listening to the poor, thin voice as it proclaimed the gospel of that ancient yet ever-glorious time, and then she heard another voice deep down in her heart crying jubilantly, " It's coming ! "

" But what of the world," he went on, " in which that exalted life developed ? Like Moses on the mountain-top, I have only seen it from afar, only lingered in its outer courts ; but I have seen enough to know that, as long as breath is left in my body, my soul's yearning for it will never cease. There, gleaming palaces and temples rise like part of the soil, white among dark cypresses and evergreen leafy oaks. All that is clay here is marble there ; what is here cribbed and cabined by convention, there flourishes in free creative opulence ; here we have barren imitativeness, there spontaneous growth ; here laboured culture, there Nature's happy abundance ; here the deadening sense of utility, there luxuriant revelling in the beautiful ; here, plain hard, matter-of-fact Protestantism, there the joyous *naïveté* of Catholic paganism."

Lilly's heart bounded at the compliment to her faith. In a Protestant country she had been brought up a Catholic, and though there was not much time, and never had been, for piety in her home, her soul was capable of a fair amount of religious fervour. It warmed her heart to hear her faith praised, but why it should be coupled with heathenism, which she had always been taught was wicked and deplorable, puzzled

her. A whirl of chaotic, questioning thoughts distracted her attention ; she found herself unable any longer to follow the speaker, and it was only after some time that she woke up to a consciousness that he was painting the South in low, loving tones. Now she took up the threads of his discourse again, and saw a gold and blue summer heaven rising above the Elysian isles, and the sun's blood-red globe drop into a violet sea, ruffled by the sirocco. She saw the shepherds feeding their goats in meadows of shining asphodel, playing on their flutes like Pan—saw the ever-verdant beech-woods stretching up to the snow-clad summits of the Apennines ; breathed in the perfume of laurel, arbutus, and olive, and heard the music of the Angelus ascending heavenwards in the glow of eventide ; and as she gazed up once more into his face, she was almost frightened at the martyred expression of devouring longing with which his eyes stared beyond the heads of the class into space.

The school-bell sounded ; the lecture was over. He looked round him bewildered, like one who had been walking in his sleep, seized his hat, and rushed out of the room. The class-room was silent as the grave. Then the tension was broken by shy whispers and fumbling for school-satchels. Lilly, without speaking a word to anyone, escaped into the street to hide her emotion. Sobbing and singing softly to herself she ran home.

The next morning excitement reigned in the Selecta. No one thought or talked of anything else but what had happened the day before.

Anna Marholz, the daughter of a doctor, had interesting particulars to impart about the young teacher, who was a patient of her father's. She said it was urgently necessary that he should go to the Italian Riviera for the winter, as it was probable he could not live through it in his native climate.

Lilly's heart stood still. The others laid their heads together to think of how he was to be helped. It could only be accomplished in a private way, because he had no money and no official position, and the town would therefore not bear the expenses of his foreign trip.

"We will start a committee," someone proposed, and all the others agreed to the proposal with acclamation.

"Thank God !" Lilly said to herself, and felt that now his

life would be prolonged to fifty or sixty, at least. During the ten o'clock break a council of war was held, and Lilly, to her great delight, was appointed secretary of the committee.

The first meeting was held at Klein's, the confectioner's, a few days later. They dared not go to Frangipani's, the resort of young officers and barristers. Fifteen girls consumed fifteen iced meringues and fifteen cups of chocolate, the cost of which they shared, and at the same time brought forward some practical suggestions. Emilie Faber's idea was to get up a Shakespeare reading in the town-hall and to assign the part of Romeo to the leading "star" of the provincial theatre. Everyone approved, because all the girls were crazy about the favourite actor. Not less well received was a scheme of Käthe Vitzing's, whose cousin sang tenor in the college choir, to organise an amateur concert. Rosalie Katz, more business-like than the rest, thought of getting blank subscription-forms printed and taking them round to all the well-to-do people in the town. This plan was not so popular, but finally it was decided to accept it and to try and put all three plans into execution. Lilly, in her rôle of secretary, made a note of all the suggestions, and kept saying to herself, "Hurrah, it's for *him*!"

Meanwhile, the lectures on the history of art continued, as well as the sittings of the committee. The bill for refreshments mounted higher and higher, but enthusiasm for the object of the meetings became visibly damped. Not that Dr. Mälzer's lectures were in any degree less fascinating. They still held his listeners in thrall with their rich imagery and flowery language, but serious obstacles arose in the carrying out of the plans to aid him. To begin with: the popular Romeo had to appear in another town during the autumn season, and was not available; secondly, the college chorus could not get leave to join with the Selecta in giving an amateur concert; and the house-to-house collection could not be set on foot without the sanction of the police, and this no one had courage to ask for. So the great scheme of lofty benevolence gradually died out, and Lilly found herself three marks to the bad for confectionery. She knew the way to the pawnshop, alas! too well, and it required comparatively little pluck on her part to sacrifice the small gold cross she wore round her neck—a last relic of more prosperous days. She did it gladly, because it was done for him.



Autumn came, and Dr. Mälzer grew worse. He coughed a great deal, and now and then covered his mouth with his pocket-handkerchief, afterwards examining it with an anxious, furtive eye. And then came the announcement that the lectures on Art would be discontinued till further notice. Anna Marholz brought the news to school that he had broken a blood-vessel. Lilly, without stopping to ask for further details, jumped to the conclusion that he was dying. After dark she found her way stealthily to his house, Anna Marholz having got his address from her father's books. There was a lamp with a green shade burning faintly in the window. Not a shadow stirred. No hand drew down the blind, but the lamp went on burning faintly the whole time that Lilly paced the damp street. Her conscience pricked her for not being at home helping her hard-worked mother; yet the next evening and the next she repeated the pilgrimage. She became more and more distressed, and fancied him lying there in his death-throes with no loving, gentle woman's hand to minister to him. On Saturday her anxiety took her from the work-table at home early in the afternoon. It was impossible to walk up and down before the house in broad daylight, but once there she didn't like to go back. Then suddenly she acted on an heroic impulse. She went to a florist's and spent the two marks fifty that was left over from the pawning of her little gold cross on a bunch of brownish-yellow autumn roses. With these she sprang up the steps of the house and rang at the door of the second floor, whence the light of the green-shaded lamp had proceeded. The door was answered by an old hag in a dirty blue-check apron. Lilly stammered forth his name.

"He lives at the back," said the old woman, and shut the door.

Then the green lamp wasn't his after all; it belonged instead to an old woman who wore dirty aprons and champed with her toothless gums. She had been worshipping at the wrong shrine for more than a week.

Lilly, utterly discouraged, was about to descend the staircase when his name caught her eye on one of the brass plates inside the lobby. Her heart gave a bound, and before she realised what she was doing she had knocked.

A pause ensued and then his head appeared through the half-opened door. The collar of his grey coat was turned up,

apparently because he had no collar underneath. His hair was dishevelled, and the ends of his moustache drooped more than ever on either side of his mouth. His eyes seemed to ask in embarrassed surprise, "What have you come here for?"

"Fräulein—Fräulein——" He evidently recognised her, but could not recall her name. Lilly wanted to give him the roses and run away, but she was paralysed with shyness, and remained glued to the spot. "I presume you have been sent by your class?" he asked.

"Yes," assented Lilly eagerly. This saved her.

"I could not invite you to come in otherwise," he said, smiling nervously. "The consequences might be serious for both of us. But if you come as an emissary, that makes all the difference. Please come in."

Lilly had pictured him in a suite of lofty apartments filled with books, curios, instruments, and statues of great men. She was horrified to find that he lived in one small room. The bed was still unmade; besides the bed there was no furniture except a couple of chairs, a folding-table, a clothes-rack and a stand for books containing a few shabbily-bound volumes and paper-covered periodicals.

"This is a worse place than ours," she thought, and felt less shy as she sat down on one of the two chairs. Poverty seemed a bond between them.

"How very kind of the young ladies to think of me!" he said.

Lilly remembered the flowers that she held in her hand. "Will you accept these?" she asked, offering them to him.

He took the bunch of roses and held them against his face without a word of thanks.

"They have no smell," he remarked. "They are the last roses, but my first, so you can imagine how much I appreciate them."

Lilly's eyes grew dim with delight. "Are you still in great pain, Dr. Mälzer?" she stammered forth.

He laughed. "Pain? . . . Oh dear no! I am feverish now and then, that's all. It's quite amusing to be feverish. One's soul floats away in an airship far away over cities, land, and sea, over centuries; one is visited by distinguished persons, if not so beautiful as——"

He paused in the middle of his compliment, thinking of their relations as master and pupil. His confusion seemed to

clear his vision. He fixed his eyes, which burned like two flames in blue cavities, on her and asked in a voice which sounded higher pitched and hoarser than usual :

"What's your name ? "

"I am Lilly—Lilly Czepanek."

The name conveyed nothing to him, because he had not lived long in the town.

"You think of taking up teaching ? "

"Yes, doctor."

"Listen to my advice. Don't ! Go to Russia and hurl bombs. Go to a hospital and wash feet. Marry a drunken scoundrel who'll ill-treat you and sell the very bed you lie on. Anything rather than being a teacher. You mustn't be a teacher, not *you*."

"But why shouldn't I ? " she asked.

"I'll tell you. . . . The qualifications for a teacher are a flat chest, weak eyes, poor hair, and a character that can see one side of a question only. People whose nerves and blood are too feeble to live their own lives are good enough to teach others, but those whose blood courses through their veins like molten fire, whose eyes are filled with longing, to whom the problems of life are there for seeing and knowing, not for blind mechanical vivisection, they—but I mustn't go on, though I should like to."

"Oh, please go on—please," Lilly besought him.

"How old are you ? "

"Sixteen."

"And a woman already ! " He looked at her with an expression of tortured admiration.

"Look at me ! " he exclaimed. "I too was once a human being, though you'd hardly believe it. I held my arms stretched out to heaven, full of burning desires. I too looked into a girl's eyes with longing, though they were not such a pair of eyes as yours. Let me chatter. You see, I am a dying man, and it'll do you no harm."

"You mustn't die ! you shall not die, Dr. Mälzer ! " she cried, jumping to her feet.

"Sit down, child," he said with a laugh ; "don't excite yourself about me. A friend of mine once broke the backbone of a wild-cat with one blow of a stick. The cat couldn't run away, couldn't cry or do anything till the next blow came. It just crouched on all-fours, coughing and choking. That's

like me. There's nothing to be done. You had better go, child. I've made my peace, but when I look at you it becomes difficult again."

She turned her face away not to show her tears.

"Must I?" she asked.

"Must?" he laughed again. "I'll devour greedily every minute of your presence here as the hungry beggar devours the crumbs he turns out of his pockets. You sat, didn't you, at the end of the first form on the left? . . . Yes, of course I remember. I said to myself, 'What extraordinary eyes!' They are like the eyes of the magic dog in Andersen's fairy tale, which grew bigger the more they were asked not to."

It was Lilly's turn to laugh.

"There, you see," he said, "I've made you merry again. You shall not carry away from here nothing but the memory of a corpse and death's-head. We enjoyed our lectures, didn't we?"

Lilly answered with a sigh.

"You gasped for sheer longing when I talked of Italy. I used to think: she gasps like yourself, though she has no need to gasp."

"You want to go there very much, doctor?"

"You might as well ask a man on fire whether he'd like a cold bath."

"And it's the only thing that can do you any good?"

He looked at her for a moment with a dark savage expression.

"What are you cross-examining me for? Have you come to find out something? I am very indebted to you and the young ladies of the class for such sympathetic interest—but——"

A fit of coughing stifled his voice.

Lilly sprang up to see if she could do anything for him. Involuntarily she snatched up a glass filled with a pale fluid from the table and held it to his lips. He took it eagerly, and after drinking fell back exhausted and gazed at her tenderly with grateful eyes. She returned his gaze with a faint smile, feeling it was infinite happiness to be there.

It was so quiet in the half-dark stuffy little room that she could hear the tick of his watch, which hung on the opposite wall. He made an effort to sit up and go on talking, but

appeared not yet quite equal to it. Lilly gave him a look of entreaty and warning ; and, smiling, he leaned back again. So they continued in silence.

" Oh, how happy I am ! " thought Lilly. " How happy I am to be here ! "

Then he held his hands out to her with a weary gesture. She caught them in hers eagerly. His skin felt hot and clammy, and it seemed as if his pulse beat in his fingertips. Hers was beating fast too, but could not keep pace with it.

" Listen to me, my dear child," he murmured. " I want to give you some good advice before you go. You overflow with a superfluity of love ; three kinds of love—love emanating from the heart, from the senses, and from compassion. One or other is necessary to everybody who isn't a dried-up fossil, but two are dangerous, and all three are likely to lead to ruin. Be on guard where your power of loving is concerned. Don't squander your love. That is the advice of one on whom you cannot squander it, for God knows he needs it."

" Have you no one to take care of you ? " she asked, dreading to hear that anyone but herself was privileged to nurse him.

He shook his head.

" Mayn't I come again ? "

He flinched. The fervour of her question was startling. " It depends on whether the class send you."

Lilly now cast off every shred of deception. " That was not true," she stammered. " Not true ! The class didn't send me. No one knows I've come."

He bounded to his feet—almost as if he were quite well. His face lengthened with dismay ; his eyes filled with tears. He stretched out a trembling hand, as if he would ward her off.

" You must go at once," he whispered ; " at once ! "

Lilly did not stir.

" If you don't go," he went on excitedly, " your prospects will be ruined. It is not customary for young girls to call on unmarried men in my position, even when the man is their master, and such a wreck as I am. Mention to no one that you have been here, not even to your greatest friend. Remember, your living depends on your reputation, and I should

be taking the bread out of your mouth if I let you stay. Go instantly ! ”

“ Am I never to come again ? ” Her eyes pleaded.

“ No ! ” he thundered in a voice of iron resolve.

The next minute Lilly was pushed out of the room and the key turned in the lock behind her.

She lost no time in disobeying his urgent instructions, and went straight to Rosalie Katz, her chosen friend for the time being, to whom she confided everything, and in whose company she relieved herself by having a good cry. The little brown Jewess was soft-hearted and desperately in love with him too, so they mingled their tears. They forgot to shut the door, however, and it happened that the portly and wealthy Herr Katz, whose waistcoat buttons were always bursting off, came in to ask his daughter to sew one on. Finding the two girls locked in a tearful embrace, he tactfully withdrew ; but no sooner had Lilly left the house than he extracted the whole story from Rosalie, of the invalid master, the abortive committee meetings, and wasted iced meringues.

“ I dare say we can arrange the matter,” he said, twisting the thin gold watch-chain that dangled from the third button of his waistcoat. A thick gold watch-chain was the insignia of being left behind in the social race among the gentlemen of the corn trade.

So it happened that Dr. Mälzer received a few days later a registered letter from two “ well-wishers.” In it he was told that means had been found to defray the expenses of his foreign tour. All he had to do was to draw a cheque on the firm of Goldbaum, Katz & Co. He started on a chilly October evening, and the staff saw him off at the station. Lilly and Rosalie, who had found out the time his train departed, were there too, but they kept in the background. He passed close by them, muffled in a thick plaid, his eyes aflame, fixed on the distance. After the train had gone, the two girls threw themselves in each other's arms, and wept for joy and pride in what they had done for him. Rosalie stood her friend an *éclair* on the way home, it being too cold now for iced meringues. Half an hour later they were sitting in the confectioner's, smiling happily over pictures in the illustrated papers.

## CHAPTER IV

**S**PRING brought renewed hope and promise of brighter times for Frau Czepanek. So certain was she that in a very short time now her husband would return, that she determined to give up the needle-work drudgery and find a pleasanter way of making a living.

It would be simple enough to rent a floor consisting of nine rooms, to furnish them on credit, and put up a plate with the inscription "Board and Lodging for Students." Once start the enterprise and the rest would follow. The idea took possession of Frau Czepanek's brain, half dazed as it was from the perpetual maddening whirl of the sewing-machine. Lilly, though she liked the prospect of a less strenuous life, entertained doubts as to the scheme working. She remembered, with a shudder, the abusive threats of the duns who had bombarded them after papa's departure, and she failed to see where enough students were to come from to fill nine rooms when the summer term had begun and all had found other accommodation. But her mother would not listen to reason. The attic resounded with her triumphant "I shall do this," and "I shall do that." She announced her intention of calling on the mayor, and going to the council of the college to get them to recommend her.

In these days she set out on mysterious expeditions alone, and when Lilly came in from school she was no longer greeted at the bottom of the stairs by the familiar din of the sewing-machine. She would find the front-door key under the mat. Her mother became more reserved and secretive as the time for the great plunge drew nearer. Her face wore the suppressed smile of parents before a Christmas tree, only that there was a certain defiant contempt in it as well. She painted herself more thickly than ever, and the rouge-pot, which once had been hidden from Lilly's eyes, stood flaunting itself openly on the

chest of drawers. Money did not grow more plentiful. Lilly had to devote every minute she could spare from her lessons to make up for mamma's neglect. Frau Czepanek set her feet on the treadles only on rare occasions when Lilly urged her to resume the work, which was delivered more and more irregularly, so that mother and daughter stood in danger of losing the employment on which their existence depended. Lilly, young and vigorous though she was, felt her strength severely taxed, but she took it calmly, assuring herself optimistically that "something would turn up before long." She would not have grudged her mother the intoxication of her new-born hopes so much, if she could have had her proper nights' rest instead of having to lie in her clothes on the outside of the bed from two till six in the morning. In school Lilly sat with heavy red eyes, unable to see or think as she was expected to do, and masters began to complain of her, more and more frequently.

It was high time for the change to come, and fate ordained that it should come on a sultry grey July day, when Lilly, returning home from school, saw two vans standing at the door, crammed with furniture smelling of recently applied varnish, and heard her mother's shrill tones in converse with strangers. With a beating heart she ran up the steps. Two carmen in leather aprons, with amused red faces, one with an open bill in his hand, were demanding payment. Frau Czepanek, running her fingers through the hair which she had just frizzed with the curling-tongs, marched up and down the room and shouted bitter reproaches about broken promises and extortionate rascally conduct. The men simply laughed at her, and reminded her that they wanted to get home that night. Then Frau Czepanek, in a fury, tried to snatch the bill from the carman, and when he declined to give it up she started belabouring him with her fists. Lilly quickly sprang between them, seized her struggling mother's wrists and ordered the men to go, assuring them everything would be arranged. They obeyed, and now her mother's wrath descended on Lilly.

"If you had not interfered," she yelled, "I should have got the receipt out of them, and the furniture would have been unpacked to-night in the new flat. You've spoilt it all, and I shall now have to be at them again to-morrow."

"The new flat!" echoed Lilly. "What new flat?"



Frau Czepanek laughed. How stupid Lilly was ! Did she think that she had been doing nothing all this time ? And then it all came out. The flat of nine rooms had been taken and they were to move in at once. The plate even was already engraved, and when hung up would have a magical effect. She had made every sacrifice, strained every nerve, that the rooms should be furnished in a way worthy of their exterior. She had bought curtains for twelve windows in a Chinese pattern ; six good rugs to bear the tread of students, who wore out cheap carpets like muslin, and large-sized English jugs and basins, in white and gold, to put on the marble washstands. The dinner service, which she had also purchased, was not ready, as it took some time to get a monogram burnt in, but they could make shift with a common set of sixteen pieces for the present. She had expended great care and thrift on her choice of things, and everything would be in perfect taste.

She wandered restlessly, as she talked, round the table in the middle of the room. Her small narrow eyes, that looked as if they hadn't closed in sleep for many a night, glittered, and under the rouge on her hollow cheeks burned the scarlet flush of fever.

Lilly, who began to feel a little uncomfortable, ventured to ask what had been done about paying for the things.

Her question was laughed to scorn. " If you are a lady, you can do anything with the tradespeople. They know that I, as the wife of Kilian Czepanek, musical conductor, am entitled to respect and to credit ; or they ought to know it."

" Has all the furniture been taken to the flat ? " Lilly queried again.

Frau Czepanek's merriment was renewed. " Before the rooms are ready, you goose ? Not likely ! Rooms have to be painted, papered, and decorated. I have taken no end of trouble to select artistic papers," she added, with the grand air of a person whose powers of paying are unlimited.

A sickening feeling of perplexity took possession of Lilly. It was like not being sure whether your school-fellows were making a fool of you or not. There was nothing for dinner too, which made matters worse. Lilly set the coffee on the hob to boil and put the rolls on the table. They would have to skip dinner to-day. The Czepanek household had become quite expert in the art of skipping meals.

Lilly's mother said no time must be lost before beginning to pack, and she gulped down her coffee hurriedly. Then suddenly she got into another towering rage.

"If only you hadn't held my hands, you idiot!" she screamed, "we should have got that lovely new furniture into its place by to-morrow. Now we shall have to move in with this rubbish. What will people think when they see it?"

She ran her fingers through her singed locks and brandished the bread-knife with which she was cutting her roll in half. Next she turned up her sleeves, put on her blue working apron, and declared that she would start the packing that very instant. She turned out the wardrobe and piled clothes on the foot of the bed. Underwear and linen out of the linen-press she scattered over the floor in wildest confusion.

The veins stood out in knots on her shrivelled arms, perspiration ran down her face. Lilly, with a feeling of oppression at her heart, looked on. When she saw the score of "The Song of Songs," their dearest treasure, carelessly thrown on the floor, she stooped to pick it up from amongst the litter of sheets and nightgowns.

"What are you doing with 'The Song of Songs'?" cried her mother, rising in haste from her knees.

"Nothing," said Lilly in surprise. "I was merely putting it on the table."

"You're a liar," the woman screeched, "and an abandoned girl! You want to steal the score from me as you stole the receipt. But I'll be even with you!"

Lilly, to her horror, saw a sudden flash of steel before her eyes, felt a sharp pain at her throat and something warm trickling soothingly over her left breast.

It was not till her mother attempted a second thrust that Lilly realised it was the bread-knife that her mother held in her hand. With a piercing scream, she grasped her mother's wrist; but she had developed all at once the strength of a lioness, and Lilly would most probably have been worsted in the struggle if neighbours had not rushed in to see what all the noise was about.

Frau Czepanek was caught from behind and bound with towels, the bread-knife still clenched in her hand with a tenacity that no power on earth could loosen. Not till the doctor, who was called in to give her a soothing draught, came did

she let it fall. Lilly's wound was dressed, and she was taken to the hospital, where she was kept because no one knew what to do with her. There she learnt, in due course, that her mother had been removed to the provincial lunatic asylum, of which she was likely to be an inmate for the rest of her days.

Lilly was alone in the world.

## CHAPTER V

"YES, my dear young lady," said the distinguished lawyer, Herr Doktor Pieper, "I have been appointed your guardian, and have accepted the post because I considered it my duty. Ah! you want the papers *re* Lemke *versus* Militzky," he went on, interrupting himself to speak to the head clerk. "What was I saying? Oh, to be sure. I considered it my duty, although I am a very busy man, to befriend, as far as lies in my power, the widow and orphan."

He passed his well-manicured left hand over his shining bald pate and straw-coloured beard, which half concealed the mouth of a man of the world and an epicure.

"My wards all do well," he continued. "I am proud of their success. How do they manage it? Well, that's my affair—a secret of business, as it were. I am certain, my child, that you too will fall on your feet eventually. I should hardly be so interested in you if it were not highly probable. The first thing to be considered is a suitable situation. Plain young ladies are the most difficult to suit, unless they happen to be humble and unassuming. It pays them to boast of so-called Christian virtues. You, of course, do not belong to the plain sort. Possibly you are conscious of it, and I only tell you in order that you should learn to assert yourself. The main point in the art of living is to discriminate between self-assertion that is justified, and the reverse. You must, that is to say, gauge your own power according to circumstances. Now, young girls such as you——"

At this moment the head clerk, tall and lank, again appeared at his elbow, with a portfolio.

"At five o'clock the Labischin divorce suit comes on," he said to the man, as he took the documents from his hand. "At quarter past, Reimann and Reimann *versus* Fassbender.

Get everything in readiness and see that someone accompanies this young lady. You will learn where from the papers."

The man vanished.

"Well, my dear young lady," her guardian continued, "the time which I can spare you is at an end. You will not be able to resume your school studies, of course. The means are not forthcoming. Even if they were, I rather doubt its being advisable. Governesses do sometimes make brilliant marriages certainly, though oftenest in the pages of English novels; but they are exposed—excuse my plain speaking—to all sorts of temptation, and are sometimes led astray. I should like to get you a place in a large photographic studio, where your duties would be to receive customers; but you would hardly have enough self-assurance for such a post at present. I have therefore found a position for you in a lending library, more as a trial than a permanency. There your light will not be altogether hidden under a bushel. The salary—I need not emphasise the fact—will be moderate: twenty marks a month with board and lodging. You will have every opportunity of letting your fancy browse among the literature of all people and all ages. So, my dear young lady—Good God! why are you crying?"

Lilly wiped tears from her eyes and cheeks. "I'm only just out of the hospital," she explained. "I feel rather—I am very sorry."

The distinguished lawyer, smiling, shook his head, the baldness of which appeared to be as tended and cared for as the face of a beautiful woman.

"You'll have to give up the habit of crying. Tears are quite out of place till you have a settled career before you. . . . There's something else I have got to say. Your poor mother's small effects must be sold. The proceeds of the sale will serve as a little competence for your rainy days. It is very important that you should make sure of this capital, such as it is. Now, under the escort of my man, you shall go back to your home—I have the key in my bureau—and select a few articles which you may care to have either for use or as mementoes. Good-bye, my dear. . . . In six months come to me again."

Lilly felt in hers a cool, flabby hand that seemed incapable of giving or returning pressure. Then she found herself staggering down the dark staircase, conducted by a clerk who

had the key and was to take her to her old home. She wanted to ask questions, to protest about what she didn't know. The clerk swung the key in silence, and didn't look round till he opened the door of the room in which she and her mother had lived. It was close and smelt musty; shafts of light came through the blinds, piercing the dusk. As she stood there, Lilly felt as if she were standing on the grave of her childhood and youth, that everything had come to an end, and there was nothing to be done but shut herself up here and die.

The clerk unfastened the shutters and threw open the windows. The clothes were still piled on the bed, the linen strewn the floor, and on the boards were dark brownish stains—the blood which had flown from her throat. The knife, too, still lay there. Lilly was ashamed to cry before the clerk, who stood staring vacantly and whistling to himself, as she threw her things into the basket-trunk which her mother had intended to use for the move to the nine-roomed flat. She chose a few books at random, and put some copy-books on top; then she looked about her for keepsakes. Her head swam; she saw things without recognising them. But there on the table, held together with india rubber bands, splashed with her blood, was the score of "The Song of Songs." No one had touched it because no one knew its value. She caught it up, shut down the lid of the box, and with the roll of music under her arm she stepped out into her new life, thirsting for new experiences.

## CHAPTER VI

**F**RAU ASMUSSEN had two daughters, who had run away for the third time. All the neighbours knew it, and Lilly was given full particulars almost directly she set foot in the badly-lighted room, smelling of leather and dustiness, where torn volumes, ranged on shelves of pine, mounted to the ceiling.

Frau Asmussen was a dignified-looking and portly person, who received Lilly at the entrance of the library, and amidst kisses and tears assured her that she had loved her as her own daughter before she saw her, and now that they had met she was perfectly enchanted with her. "Who can ever say that strangers are cold and distant again?" thought Lilly, delighted with her reception.

"Did I say my own daughter? I should have said, ten times more than my own daughters. One's own daughters are vipers who turn and sting; one must pluck them from one's bosom——"

She had to pause, because the lethargic clerk who had come with Lilly in the cab was bringing in her box. When he had gone, Frau Asmussen continued:

"Do you suppose I loved my daughters, or that I did not love them? Haven't I said to them every day: 'Your father was a blackguard, a cur, and may God forgive him!' And what do you think they did? Went off one fine morning—went off on their own hook—leaving a note on the table: 'We're going to father. You bully us more than we can put up with, and we are sick of everlasting milk puddings.' You see what I am, my dear—I am kindness itself. Do I look as if I could hurt a fly, much less my own daughters? And they did it not once, but three times; this is the third time they have exposed me to the scoffs and jeers of the town—the third time they have disgraced me. Twice they came back in rags

and misery, and I have taken them to my heart and forgiven them. But just let them try it on again—let them come back a third time! There's a broomstick behind the door ready for them. Directly they show their noses inside, out they shall go into the street. I'll beat them, and then sweep them out at the door like so much waste-paper." And with an air of unspeakable disgust Frau Asmussen swept an invisible something through the hall and gave it a kick over the step.

"Poor, poor woman!" thought Lilly. "How much she must have suffered!" and she vowed inwardly to do her best to make up to the mother for the loss of such unworthy daughters.

At this point a young man came in to change a book. He asked for a volume of Zola, and looked at Lilly as much as to say, "You see what a dog I am."

Frau Asmussen shook her head reproachfully, and fetched down the book required from an upper shelf. He clutched it eagerly, without heeding in the least the glance of warning with which the old lady handed it to him.

"You see, my dear," she said when he had gone, "that's how the young go to perdition, and I am condemned to help them on the way."

"Why?" asked Lilly.

"Do you know how a chemist's shop is arranged?"

Lilly said she had often been in one, but couldn't remember. "One place is marked 'Poison,'" her employer went on, "and in it are kept the most deadly poisons known to humanity. On that account the door is kept locked, and no one may touch the contents save the chemist and his assistants. Now, just look round; half these books are poison, too. Nearly everything that's written in these days is pernicious trash, and lures the reader on to destruction. Yet I am bound to keep these books, bound to distribute them, though my heart is wrung as I hand them over the counter. My undutiful daughters are an example. They read, read—did nothing but read the whole night through; and when they were stuffed full of impudence and nonsense, they turned up their noses at the food I gave them and the cooking, and went out for walks, till at last they sneaked off to their father—that miserable worm! that swindler and scum! with his face all out in pimples! I warn you, my child, against that man. Should



you ever meet him, gather up your skirts as I am doing now, to avoid contamination."

Lilly shuddered at the account of this vile monster in human shape, and was happy that she had found a protectress in his deserving wife.

An hour or so later they sat down to supper, which consisted of milk pudding and slices of bread and dripping. Lilly, unused to anything but the simplest fare, was easily persuaded that no milk puddings in the world were as delicious as Frau Asmussen's, and that the Kaiser himself could not sit down to a more daintily prepared meal than was spread on her table. She missed, it is true, the slice of ham which she had been given every night at the hospital ; if this had been added, her supper would have seemed the acme of gastronomic delights.

More enjoyment awaited her when she went to bed. The library was part of a big room with three windows, which was divided into four compartments by two long bookcases running from the wall where the windows were, and by a counter opposite the door that communicated with the entrance, and thus there was only one narrow gangway to connect one compartment with another. At bed-time Frau Asmussen carried into the furthest compartment two forms, on which she laid a mattress and made up a bed. The space was so confined and filled up that Lilly had to jump over a bench at the foot of her improvised bed to get into it, and she thought this great fun. She fell asleep wedged in between two high upright bookcases, the window above her head, a chair beside her on which her things were piled, and "The Song of Songs" clasped in her arms.

The next morning she was initiated into her duties as librarian. She learnt the system by which the thousands of volumes were arranged on the shelves, and as she knew her alphabet she would have mastered it in five minutes, and been able to fetch any of the popular books from their places, if Frau Asmussen had followed her own system, instead of placing the books anyhow and so courting confusion and muddle. A worse task was to find the names of books and authors in the general catalogue, and entries of customers in the ledger, which were also supposed to be alphabetical ; but the carelessness of Frau Asmussen and her daughters had reduced the whole to chaos. Lilly set to work with burning

zeal to put things in order, and for several weeks the attainment of this desired goal was her sole object in life.

Frau Asmussen provided her with some surprises, even on the day after her arrival. Lilly saw nothing of her after the morning hours till supper-time ; then Lilly found her nodding over a steaming teacup which exhaled an agreeable odour of rum and lemons.

" I suffer from nasal catarrh," Frau Asmussen explained, blinking at Lilly with her rather watery grey eyes. " And one of our most noted physicians has prescribed this medicine."

Lilly ate her milk pudding while Frau Asmussen continued sipping at the contents of her teacup, giving now and then a melancholy groan.

" Have I told you about my daughters ? " she asked, after a pause.

" Oh yes," responded Lilly respectfully. All the morning there had been scarcely any other topic of conversation than these two scapegrace daughters and the wicked man they called father.

" But I don't think I can have given you any idea how charming they are," Frau Asmussen went on. " Though I say it that shouldn't, there isn't their match in the world for beauty and talent and lovable qualities. In such young girls, filial devotion, self-sacrificing industry, and touching modesty like theirs is not often found. They are so practical too, so thoroughly reliable in all that relates to business, besides being brimful of affection. You should take example from them, my dear, for you are very far from being anything like those models of perfect girlhood."

Lilly's spoon dropped from her fingers. She could hardly believe her ears, and the old lady maundered on :

" It was heartrending to part with them, and they cried themselves ill for days and nights beforehand. They were obliged to go to their father. Have I mentioned my husband to you ? The best and noblest of men, from whom fate has parted me, but who cherishes for me an undying tenderness, and whom I shall love till death. . . . What a man ! Pray, my child, on your knees that you may one day be the wife of such a man, and worthy of him. Alas ! I was not—not worthy, no, not at all."

Two tears of unutterable remorse ran down her cheeks. She had a deal further to say about the superlative virtues

of her two daughters, her husband's lofty character, and her own abject inferiority, and after several more doses of the medicine prescribed by the eminent physician she sobbed and moaned herself to sleep.

The next morning Frau Asmussen began the day's work by scolding Lilly for sweeping out the library with the broom standing behind the door.

"It's kept there for one purpose only," she said, "and that is to chastise those two hussies when they appear at my door; and if you ever dare to touch it again you will be the first to feel what it's like."

After this, Lilly began to regard her future through less rose-coloured glasses. A worse blow was to come. Frau Asmussen, who seemed deeply concerned about Lilly's spiritual welfare and the purity of her mind, strictly forbade her to read any of the books in her library.

"After what I have experienced with my daughters," she said, "I know the evil results of novel-reading, and I'll take care that you don't go the same way."

While the work of rearranging the catalogue and the ledgers lasted, the temptation to disobey orders did not occur frequently. But when autumn set in, and, in spite of the increase of subscribers, her time became less occupied and the hanging lamp was lighted early over the library table, when Frau Asmussen yielded sooner to the effects of the medicine prescribed by the eminent physician, and fell into a stupor, Lilly was driven by curiosity and boredom to do what she had been forbidden.

She was first put up to it by a girl who came to change the first volume of a novel for the second. The second volume was out, and the girl positively wept for disappointment. She declared that she couldn't wait to know how the story ended. It would kill her. Lilly good-naturedly advised her to go to one of the other circulating libraries, which were said to be larger and superior, and she went so far as to return the girl her three marks deposit. The novel devourer thanked Lilly and departed with renewed hopes.

Lilly scanned the outside of the dirty, torn volume she had left on the counter, then cautiously peeped inside. "Debit and Credit," by Gustav Freytag, was on the title-page. She had heard them raving about this book when she was in the first class at school, but there was no time for novel-reading

in the life of a sweated machinist's daughter. She glanced timidly at the first page, then went to the glass door and listened for a few minutes to the peaceful snores that came from the back parlour. Soon afterwards she was launched with full-spread sails on the wide ocean of romance. At four in the morning, when she had finished the first volume, she was in desperation at the thought that she could not go on with the story, and wondered who had the missing volume, and how she was to get hold of it. Then she fell asleep.

The next day she pored over the ledger to try and trace the name and address of the subscriber who had not returned the second volume of "Debit and Credit." But, as the entries were made by the numbers and not by the titles of the books, she missed it over and over again in her excitement. So at last she was compelled to seek an outlet for her newly awakened craving in another book.

Henceforward her life became an orgy of novel-reading. She went about her daily task with heavy lids and aching limbs, burnt a huge amount of midnight oil, and only escaped the suspicions of Frau Asmussen by lies and tricks. Then one dreadful winter morning it all came out. The stove in the library burning low towards midnight, Lilly's feet became cold, and she took to reading in bed with the lamp, which she removed from its hanging socket, on the window-sill above her pillow, where there was plenty of room for it. Though this involved the bitter discomfort of having to get out of bed again in order to put back lamp and book in their places—Frau Asmussen was often now in the library earlier than Lilly—she would have rather gone out in the cold street in her nightgown than have sacrificed those dearly bought extra hours.

So it came about that one morning she awoke in a fright to behold Frau Asmussen, already dressed, dangling a black strap over her white nightgown, while the lamp, which Lilly had secretly refilled at one o'clock, still burned on the window-sill. She had never in her life before been whipped, and at first hardly grasped what was going to happen, when Frau Asmussen leapt as nimbly as her corpulence would permit on to the counterpane over the bedrail, and crouching there like some fat old plucked hen, began to belabour her over the ears with the strap.

A bad time now began for Lilly. What was the good of being sincerely repentant, and swearing to herself and to Frau

Asmussen that she would not do it again? The new craze so intoxicated her, she was so absorbed with the new, beautiful imaginary world in which there were no tiresome servants sent by subscribers to change books, no wet umbrellas, no missing volumes, no back numbers of magazines that refused to be found, no insipid milk puddings, and no thrashings, that, had she had a martyr's joy in renunciation, she could not have returned to her former unbroken routine. She was now so completely governed by her imagination that her actual everyday existence, with its deadly monotony and lonely hours, seemed to her an unreal dream, and her life had no reality till she opened a book and turned over its sticky pages. She was too docile and unresisting to attempt to justify this passion even in her own eyes. It was wrong, she knew, to feed her mind on this heaven-sent food; but she could not help it.

Frau Asmussen hit on a fiendish method of humiliating Lilly still further. She regarded religion, like many orthodox Protestants, solely in the light of a penance, and, though hitherto she had not concerned herself in the least about Lilly's creed, she now took to beginning every meal with a long-winded prayer, in which, in face of the steaming soup-tureen, she commended Lilly amidst tears and sighs to the Lord, and begged Him to forgive her sinful depravity.

Woe to Lilly if there was any backsliding! That first chastisement did not by any means remain the only one. She was cuffed and beaten on the slightest provocation, and storms of abuse descended on her unprotected head. In fact, she scarcely dared breathe till the soothing medicine prescribed by the eminent physician began to do its work. Then Lilly seized the first book she came across, and suffered all the agonies of the heroines in the stories about lost will: and broken marriages, about poison, arson, and murder; with them she loved, and conquered, and died, finding in it all a never-ending source of ecstasy.

## CHAPTER VII

**I**T was a spring-like evening in March, with bright sunshine. The last grimy heaps of snow lying along the gutters had melted into radiant puddles, and a shower of silvery drops fell from the icicles clinging to the roofs. The glow of sunset lay on the houses facing south like brilliant decorative carpets, sharply divided from the shadows on the opposite side of the street. The window lattices shone as if they themselves were suns reflecting their own light, and sparrows twittered on the dripping eaves. But most welcome feature of all in this early spring of city streets was the peculiar spicy fragrance of the melting snows, rising in vapour from the gutter with promise of meadows growing green and of boughs bursting into bud. Lilly, who had hardly been out more than two or three times during the winter, sat at the counter gazing wistfully into space.

Everywhere windows and doors were wide open. Everywhere lungs thirsty for fresh air inhaled the zephyrs of coming spring. At last she too pushed open the casements, and gave the hall door a kick, which made it swing back and knock down the broom that stood in the corner behind it. She saw through the opening of the door into the rooms of the opposite tenant, who had also thrown his door wide to greet the spring.

There was a cherry-coloured sofa with embroidered chair-backs stretched over its old-fashioned scroll-shaped arms; there were wreaths of dried flowers with inscriptions framed on the walls; the helmet of a cavalry officer with swords crossed; china lions used as cigar-holders; ballet girls supporting tallow candles; photograph groups with peacock's feathers stuck between them; a glass bowl of goldfish; a goatskin rug. In the midst of all this wilderness of knick-knacks a youth paced up and down with a book in his hand, conning something

diligently ; one minute he vanished from view, only to reappear the next. At the first glance, this young man attracted Lilly's sympathetic notice. His wavy fair hair was brushed carelessly back from his forehead, the carriage of his head was erect and nonchalant, and he wore a mauve and brown striped necktie, which Lilly thought the height of refined taste.

She tried to think which of her favourite heroes he resembled most, and came to the conclusion that it was Finck in "Debit and Credit." The young man did not observe her, so she had every opportunity of studying him. When he was in sight, a warm thrill ran through her, directly he disappeared and remained hidden from view for the fraction of a second she felt a sick sensation as if someone were robbing her of her dearest possession. So it continued till he glanced up from his book, and, seeing the young lady who watched him through the door, withdrew hastily to the invisible part of his room. When he next disclosed himself he had adopted a much stiffer and more self-conscious air. He bent over his book with a studiousness that was hardly natural, moved his lips too obviously, and frowned heavily. Lilly, too, thought it necessary to improve slightly the picture she presented. She smoothed the hair that was parted Madonna fashion on her forehead, and let her arm fall carelessly over the side of the chair. A couple of maid-servants who came to change books for their mistresses put an end to this silent duet by shutting the door as they went out. Lilly did not dare to open it again. But from that evening the new hero became part of her dreams.

It was hopeless to think of asking Frau Asmussen questions so late, because she was now in the habit of preparing her medicine before the evening meal ; but the next morning, as she seemed in a fairly good temper, Lilly ventured to make a few inquiries about the neighbour of whose existence till now she had been ignorant.

"What do the neighbours matter to you, you inquisitive thing !" retorted Frau Asmussen, in that tone of polished urbanity with which she had addressed Lilly after the raptures of the first night were over.

Lilly plucked up courage to invent a tale of a regular subscriber who had asked her the day before for information about their neighbours, which she had been unable to give

him. Frau Asmussen's esteem for this subscriber was so great that she instantly became communicative.

They were respectable enough people over the way, but of low birth, and she, as a woman of a more highly-cultured mind, could not associate with them. She believed the husband was a pensioned-off sergeant-major, now working as a clerk, and that his wife made cravattes for a living. Lilly flushed, remembering the mauve and brown tie which had so dazzled her eyes the day before. How vulgarly these common people lived might be gathered from the fact that on high-days and festivals they indulged in potato soup with slices of sausage in it, which made anyone with a delicate palate like Frau Asmussen's shudder to think of.

Like the erring daughters, Lilly had long ago got tired of the eternal milk pudding, and found herself unable to agree that potato soup was vulgar. Indeed, her mouth began to water at the mere mention of it, and she changed the subject by asking if anyone else lived next door.

"I believe there's a son," replied Frau Asmussen. "He goes to the Gymnasium, though why people in that class of life should have their sons educated I don't know."

"I know why," Lilly said to herself. "I know why: it is because he is great, and genius looks forth from his eyes, because he must succeed and become a ruler of men."

The same afternoon she pushed open the swing-door again, but the weather was raw and cold, and there was no friendly face opposite to cheer her eyes. After she had gazed longingly for an hour or more at the door-plate bearing the inscription:

L. REDLICH,  
*Kindly ring and knock*

she was forced to close the door, her legs feeling like icicles, and with a feeling of humiliation that she had been snubbed. Henceforth she looked out for one o'clock, the hour when the Gymnasium students came home from school. With her nose pressed against the window-panes, she could recognise at an almost incredible distance the blue and white college caps. When he flew up the steps, she slipped behind the curtains, trembling with joy at the bashful glances he cast at her. But if he looked straight in front of him she was extremely unhappy, and hoped that she had done nothing to hurt his feelings.



There were other wearers of blue and white caps who came up the steps to the house, friends who came to cram for their examination with him. Lilly adored them all. She felt that a bond existed between her and the little circle, who had the world all before them, and intended to conquer it. In spirit she sat in their midst.

Some of them passed so quickly that she distinguished them by their caps more than by their faces. There was the forlorn-looking cap, the faded, the smart, the limp. Each of the youths too had his characteristic way of walking and knocking at the door. She could tell, even when she was busy giving out books, and without looking, how many of young Redlich's chums had come or had not come to work with him.

Meanwhile, the days grew longer and spring was advancing. The tenants of the house began to sit on the terrace in front, where there were chairs and tables.

The boys often lingered there chatting with their friend before going in to their studies, and when they were gone he leaned over the balustrade in the twilight alone, dreaming doubtless of his great future.

Then Lilly, with beating heart, stationed herself behind a book-rack, from which she had artfully cleared away enough volumes to form a peep-hole, whence she could admire to her heart's content the leonine brow so full of thought and profound intellect.

The seats on the terrace in front of the library windows were mostly unoccupied, as they belonged to Frau Asmussen, who preferred taking her medicine indoors, and Lilly could not screw up courage to ask permission to sit there.

One May evening, however, when showery spring clouds sailed over the dark blue sky, more alluring than threatening, when it was all so still that you could hear the splashing of the market-place fountain, and the swallows were the only passers-by, Lilly simply could not contain herself any longer in the library atmosphere, smelling of old leather and parchment; and taking her embroidery, more for show than because she was industriously inclined, she went out, determined to sit on the terrace. She knew that he was out, and that he always came in before ten. He would have to pass her whatever happened. Half an hour, another half-hour, than a quarter went by, and she saw a blue and white cap coming jauntily down the street. Her first thought was to run back into the

library, but she was ashamed to do this, and sat where she was. He came, saw her, raised his cap, and went in.

"He has at least bowed to me," she thought blissfully.

Scarcely ten minutes had elapsed before he appeared again. He seated himself on a bench belonging to his side of the house, played with pebbles, whistled to himself softly, and seemed altogether oblivious of her presence.

Lilly sat on in her corner rolling and unrolling her embroidery, and now and then giving vent to her tender feelings toward him by a sigh, though she told herself she only sighed because it was so hot. Half an hour sped away thus, and Lilly began to abandon hope of anything more happening, when all of a sudden he addressed her, with his cap in his hand :

"They will soon be closing the front door, Fräulein," he said.

"Not already, surely !" she exclaimed, feigning consternation. Then, reflecting that to act on his hint would be to put an end to their acquaintance making any progress, she added in a more indifferent tone :

"It doesn't matter ; the window isn't shut."

"The window !" he repeated.

She could not make out whether in approval or blame. The conversation would have certainly come to a standstill here if she had not made a gigantic effort to keep the ball rolling.

"We are neighbours, I think," she remarked.

He sprang up from his bench, sweeping his cap down as low as his trouser pockets, and answered :

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Fritz Redlich, prefect."

Lilly felt the old thrill of reverence with which the very word "prefect" had inspired her in the Selecta when her class companions had uttered it. Then she burned with shame to think that she was now nothing better than a shop-girl. But she was determined to impress him by alluding to her more distinguished past.

"Up till last autumn," she said, "I was a Selecta pupil. I used to know some of you fellows."

"Which of us ?" he asked in excitement.

She mentioned the names of two young men who had once fluttered round her at the skating-rink, and asked if they were friends of his.

"Rather not," he answered with a contempt that didn't

seem quite genuine. "They are slackers, and loaf about too much. They intend to join a corps, too, I believe. That's not in our line."

There was a pause. Lilly could only discern the outline of his figure as he leaned against the balustrade, it had grown so dark. Drops of soft rain fell on her hair. She would have liked to stay there for ever, watching the dark young figure before her, and with the gentle moisture of spring anointing her head.

"You are engaged now in the Circulating Library?" he asked.

Lilly assented, and was grateful to him for the nice word "engaged," which seemed a little to ameliorate her lowly position.

"And you are going in for your examination?" she inquired.

"In the autumn—if all goes well," he replied with a sigh.

"And afterwards you will go out into the world," she gushed in copy-book language, "and fight your way in life? Ah, how I wish I were in your shoes."

"Why do you wish that, Fräulein?" he asked in surprise. "You are fighting your way in life now, are you not?"

Lilly laughed shrilly. "Oh, but if only I were you!" she exclaimed. "What wouldn't I—oh!"

She felt exultant; her limbs seemed to stretch, so that she scarcely knew how to sit still; the light of conquest flashed from her eyes, but there was no conquest really, for it remained unseen in the darkness.

She was so overcome, so mad with happiness, that she positively could not stay there, uttering stilted phrases, while within her something shouted: "You stand, there with your arms on the balustrade, I love you."

She bade him a hurried good-night, and ran in, bolting the door behind her. She paced up and down the narrow gangways between the books, laughing and sighing. She stretched forth her arms like a high-priestess at prayer, knocking and bruising her elbows against the shelves.

"I sought him whom my soul loveth, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me."

She sang the familiar words in a sweet, uncertain voice, not too subdued to be heard through the window. But when she looked through her peep-hole, to assure herself that he was listening, he had gone. Now she sang louder and leaned out, tearing open her tight-fitting bodice, and letting the rain-drops fall on her bare breast.

An unspeakable wretchedness suddenly took possession of her. She could not account for it, but she felt as if she must die. It was she whom the cruel watchmen were seizing ; the wounds their rough hands made on her soft skin smarted ; she could feel how they tore off the garments which veiled her nakedness from the world. In shameless nakedness, yet weeping tears of blood from bitter shame, she tottered through the streets, seeking and seeking her Soul's Beloved ; but he was further off, more unattainable than ever.

She dropped down on her knees at the window, and, burying her face in the sill, wept bitterly out of sweet compassion for that symbol of herself wandering through Jerusalem's streets at night. And, after all, what made her feel like this was happiness—sheer happiness.

## CHAPTER VIII

SHE continued to enjoy this happiness. It nestled in the cobwebby corners, perched on the books, spun golden threads from beam to beam, and it rode astride on every shaft of sunlight, which, reflected from the opposite windows, crept along the leather backs of the books. All the time Lilly heard humming within her a wonderful medley of tremulous tones, snatches of melodies, harp-strings vibrating, chirping of crickets, and twittering of birds. Waking or sleeping the concert went on, with now and then a few majestic bars of "The Song of Songs" thrown in.

Nothing was changed meanwhile in the ordinary daily routine. Frau Asmussen was alternately sober and the blissful victim of comforting drugs. Husband and daughters one hour ascended through the scale of all the virtues to the dizzy pinnacle of saints, and the next were plunged into deepest depths of infamy. Now a volume of Tolstoi was hunted for in vain, and then a Spielhagen seemed to have been spirited into space.

Sometimes little gusts of wind wafted showers of powdery gold on to the shelves. Like ordinary dust, it was swept away, yet it was a message from the tossing boughs, in the country, laden with blossom. This was all Lilly saw of the spring, save passing market-carts on which were heaped bunches of lilac and may. Her young hero opposite had made no further advances. She still trembled at the sound of his step, and received with frantically beating heart the two shy daily greetings; but there things ended.

He came no more to the terrace. The poring over books with his chums now lasted far into the night. It was often nearly two o'clock before she heard the last depart. Not till then did she fling herself on her bed, and, staring into the

summer twilight, let her fancy roam over vast territories to find a throne worthy of her hero's attainment. She saw him in the gorgeous uniform of a field-marshal winning victories on the battlefield; she saw him a poet being crowned with laurels; an inventor of world renown steering his own airship through the clouds; a founder of some new religion. . . . But when she came to this point her Pegasus halted in alarm, for she remained a good Catholic at heart, though under the smart of bodily and spiritual castigation she had not dared to take refuge in her religion. The courage to ask Frau Asmussen's leave to go to St. Ann's every morning had soon evaporated, and she had almost forgotten that confessions and masses existed.

Now, however, in an exuberance of emotions never before dreamed of, she longed to unburden her spirit, and resolved to confess to Frau Asmussen that she was a Catholic, and beg to be allowed to visit St. Joseph's altar—kind, smiling St. Joseph, who stood with upraised finger behind his gold-encircled candles.

Frau Asmussen found in Lilly's avowal the secret of all her vices, her artfulness, her laziness, her hypocrisy, and her lack of method; and she included in her nightly prayer at table a petition for Lilly's immediate conversion. All the same, she did not refuse Lilly permission to go twice a week to early mass, which was as much as she had dared expect.

Touching was the meeting between Lilly and St. Joseph after such a long estrangement. It was like going home to come back to him. The angels in the coloured glass window over his altar seemed to flutter their wings and greet her like sisters and brothers, assuring her that her penance would not be severe. The yellow and orange carpet invited her hospitably to kneel down, and from the Virgin's shrine not far away came the perfume of flowers.

The saint himself at first seemed a little hurt because she had neglected him for such a long time. But when she had confided to him all her woes, her loneliness, her beatings, her dislike of milk puddings, he became softened at once and forgave her. He had been presented with three new silver hearts since she had last knelt at his shrine. They shot up flames as long as her hand, and she felt she would like to dedicate one to him too; but why, she didn't know, for the

miracle in her case was yet to be performed. Maybe it was jealousy or vainglory that prompted her desire, for she did not like the idea of others standing on a nearer footing to him than herself. "But what can I expect," she reasoned, "when I've treated him so badly all this time?"

After confessing everything, except, of course, her love affairs—he had become too much of a stranger for that—she hurried out of the church. It was striking a quarter to eight, and her morning devotions would have been objectless and thrown away had she not met her hero on his way to school.

It was at the corner of Hassertor that she came upon him and his companions. He lifted his cap and passed on with the others, but she stood still, drawing a deep breath, as if she had just escaped a great danger.

Meetings of this kind occurred twice a week from this time onwards. Her dearly cherished secret desire that she would meet him alone one morning, that he would stop and engage in friendly conversation, was never fulfilled. There was not the faintest gleam of pleasure in his face at her approach, the strained anxious expression of his eyes did not relax in the least, though he blushed slightly as he raised his cap and walked on.

She had long ago given up all hopes that he would ever speak to her again, when one wet Sunday evening in July she heard the bell tinkle, the front door being closed on Sundays to subscribers. She opened it and there he was.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, and nearly shut the door again in her confusion.

He asked if she had Rückert's poems in the library. She knew quite well that she hadn't, but she was afraid that if she said so there would be no further pretext for conversation, so she replied that she would see. Wouldn't he come in?

After a moment's hesitation, he sat down on the chair for subscribers close to the door. Lilly hunted for a long time, for she feared if she didn't that he would go away; rather aimlessly she looked on the shelves, and kept saying half to herself, "I am sure I saw it not long ago." Then she too sat down behind the counter to try and recollect where she had seen the book. But he stimulated her to search further.

"If you saw it a short time ago, it must be there," he said. And when it became clear that it was not there he sighed deeply, and murmuring, "I don't know what I am to do," he departed.

Lilly could only stare aghast at the empty doorway, which a minute ago had encircled his tall figure. She longed to cry out, "Stay, don't go!" but the opposite door banged and it was all no good. She crouched on the window seat, and mapped out in her thoughts what might have happened if he had not gone away. Her heart beat so violently that she felt as if she must faint.

A quarter of an hour later the bell rang again. She bounded up. Could it be he come back? It was; he had left his umbrella. "You shall not get off so easily a second time," she said to herself.

He caught hold of his soaking umbrella, which she had not noticed, although it had made a puddle, which was running along the cracks of the floor, and prepared to go away again.

"What do you want Rückert's poems for?" she asked, seizing the opportunity of opening a conversation.

"Life is so full of difficulties," he lamented. "You've no idea, Fräulein, how full."

Then he told her how they had to deliver extempore orations on subjects sprung on them, with no preparation, whether they knew anything about them or not. This time, however, it had leaked out that to-morrow, in the literature lesson, a comprehensive *revue* of Rückert's works would be demanded. For this reason he wanted to glance through the poems, because he could not remember exactly who were buried in "The graves at Ottensen."

Lilly was beside herself with joy. She could help him. She, the little lowly sparrow, could be of assistance to him, the big soaring eagle. Timidly she sketched the story of the poor beaten Duke of Brunswick and the pious poet of "The Messiah." The only thing she could not remember was who were the twelve hundred exiles who were buried in the first of the graves.

He appeared incredulous at his unexpected good fortune. Was she positive? He knew from his tables and history of literature it was all right about Klopstock, but he shook his majestic head over the rest in grave doubt. Lilly eagerly set



his mind at rest. It was more than a year since she had left school and had learned all these beautiful things, but her memory was good and she wouldn't tell him wrong. At last he seemed convinced. He breathed more freely, and remarked again, turning his mind to more common things: "Yes, Fräulein, life is hard, very hard."

Now that the ice was broken he recounted his likes and dislikes. Mathematics weren't bad, indeed he had got on very well with Euclid and geometry. But there were languages, and history, and, worse still, German composition. Alas! it was a troublesome world, enough to drive one to despair.

Lilly quite agreed with him. She, too, had little reason to be satisfied with the way the world wagged, and she expressed her thoughts about it with passionate eloquence.

"And how you must detest," she concluded, "to be hampered in your high ambition by the narrow limits of school life."

He looked slightly astonished and then said: "Yes, it's beastly."

"If I were in your place," she told him, "I shouldn't bother at all about dry facts and dull lessons. I should just follow my own bent, like the great poets and philosophers."

"That's all very well, my dear Fräulein, but there's the examination," he cried, horrified.

"Oh, never mind stupid examinations. It doesn't matter whether you get through them or not."

He became excited. "You don't in the least understand, Fräulein. Examinations are the entrance to every good position in life, no matter whether you stay at the university, study law, architecture, or go into the Civil Service. Not that I should dream of doing the last."

"I should think not, indeed!" she broke in. "A man like you!"

He smiled, well pleased at the flattery.

"I am not going to take the world by storm," he said, "but I have my dreams, of course. What would a fellow be worth if he hadn't any?"

"Nothing!" she exclaimed, looking up at him delighted, with beaming eyes. She was sure this was the happiest hour she had ever known in all her life.

When he got up to go she felt actual physical pain, as if a limb were being torn from her body. He had almost closed the door when he turned as one feeling his way, and said:

"If it's not giving you too much trouble, Fräulein, I should be glad if you'd have another hunt for the poems." And then once more coming back he added: "You might put them under the door-mat if you find them."

Lilly lit the hanging lamp at once, and obediently began to look for what she knew she could never find.

He passed the long vacation in the country with a friend in misfortune, with whom he crammed. Directly after the beginning of term the written questions were to be set, and in the middle of September came the *viva voce*.

Lilly's hero looked pale and haggard, and bristles, like red shadows, appeared in the hollows of his cheeks. Lilly could not bear to see his misery without speaking, so one morning on her way from mass, when she met him alone in the empty street, she stopped.

"You must not overwork, Herr Redlich," she blurted out anxiously. "You ought to consider your health for your parents' sake and the sake of all who care for you."

He seemed more embarrassed than gratified, and before he answered cast nervous looks around him.

"It's very kind of you, Fräulein," he stammered, "but we'll discuss it later—later, if you please," and he dashed on, scarcely raising his cap.

It dawned on Lilly that she had done something dreadful. The houses began to dance before her misty eyes; she gnawed her pocket-handkerchief, and thought everyone she met must be laughing and jeering at her. When she was once more in her corner behind the catalogues she felt convinced that by her folly she had lost him for ever. Yes! he would never speak to her again.

The next day he came in without greeting her, and went out again after tea, and didn't look her way as he passed. It was all over, all over! And then someone came and knocked in the twilight; one could hardly call it knocking, it was more like a dog scratching to be let in. Lo, and behold! it was he standing there. He had not the shy yet important manner he had worn on that Sunday evening when "The graves at Ottensen" had been on his mind. His air now was more that of a burglar who has not learnt his trade.

"I say, is Frau Asmussen there?" he whispered.

"No ; she never comes in here at this time," she whispered back, trembling with joy.

"Then I may come in for a minute or two, perhaps ? "

She drew back and let him in, wondering whether it was possible to feel such bliss and live. He murmured apologies for his conduct at their last meeting. She stammered that he mustn't reproach himself, and that she had not meant to be so stupid. They sat down together on either side of the counter as they had done that Sunday evening. He was the first to lead the way back to their former point of intimacy.

"A fellow would often like to chat with a girl with whom he has something in common," he said a little pompously, "but his time is not his own, and there are so few opportunities."

"As for opportunities," Lilly thought to herself, "they could easily be found."

He went on to say that, owing to her kindly interest in him, he felt an interchange of ideas between them would be salutary, especially as he believed in the emancipation of women.

Here he halted, not knowing how to proceed, but still retaining his dignity. He challenged Lilly with his eyes, as much as to say : "You see how tactfully I am dealing with this delicate situation."

Lilly hadn't a notion what he was driving at, but it did not matter. The one thought that obsessed her was to save him from working himself to death.

"We had a master when we were in the Selecta, Herr Redlich," she began, "whose lectures were simply glorious. I shall never forget them ! Like you, he overworked. By this time I am afraid he must have died of consumption, and if you don't take care you may come to the same end."

He nodded dejectedly. "Everything's so deuced hard," he muttered to himself.

"You ought to have more sleep and take walks—plenty of walks——"

"Do *you* go for walks, Fräulein ? "

Lilly couldn't say truthfully that she ever did such a thing. Since she had been incarcerated in this den of books she had not seen a field of white snow or a green tree.

"I ! " she exclaimed, shrugging her shoulders. "Why should I go for walks ? " Then, rejoicing inwardly at her own

boldness, she suggested: "Couldn't we go together one day?"

He looked amazed. "There would be all sorts of objections," he said, shaking back his forelock. "People might talk. For your sake—especially for your sake—one must be careful."

Lilly had read about gallant young knights who set more store on their lady-love's reputation than their own passion. She glanced up at him full of grateful admiration.

"As far as I'm concerned," she cried, "you needn't be alarmed. I should simply shirk mass."

Though she may have felt a slight stab of conscience as she made this sacrilegious announcement, she was conscious that for the sake of this walk she would cheerfully have sacrificed all the saints, even St. Joseph himself.

"I must wait till after the examination," he explained.

So the matter was allowed to rest. He took his leave, Lilly speeding him with warnings and good wishes, while he glanced uneasily up and down the street, round the terrace and the entrance.

Lilly's life from this time onwards was one enraptured trance of hope and delightful anticipations. She lay awake half the night, and pictured herself wandering at rosy dawn with him through golden meadows, her hand pressed against her side to still her joyously beating heart, her arm brushing his elbow. And each time that she thought of this, a little thrill ran through her, to the tips of her toes. She read nothing but stories of glowing love and passion, pages full of "transports," "intoxicating raptures," and "clinging kisses." But of kisses in connection with herself she did not dream. She checked herself when her thoughts drifted in that direction. He was too exalted a being, too far above mere earthly desire. Now she felt that she had good reason to promise St. Joseph a silver heart.

One Sunday morning she told St. Joseph the whole story of Fritz Redlich's examination throes, of his high ideals, and her anxiety about him. But on the subject of the arranged walk she was silent, for she could not very well mention that she intended to shirk mass.

Lilly had saved during this year about sixty marks, which she carried next her skin in a leather purse. The silver heart would cost at most twenty marks, and there would be more

than enough left to buy her friend a present. She vacillated for a long time between purchasing him a gold-embroidered cigar-case, equally ornate slippers, and a revolver. Finally, she decided on a revolver in a case, for she anticipated that in the struggle for existence he would often find himself in perils that he could only be saved from by mad, daring, and swift action. The revolver cost twenty-five marks, the gold thread for embroidering a monogram on the case, five marks. So she thought she had managed very satisfactorily.

The morning of the examination she saw him come out on the terrace with a face as white as the gloves he waved in farewell to his parents. He appeared to have forgotten *her*. She felt half inclined to run after him and press the revolver into his hand, but she reflected in time that the examiners might not appreciate his being so armed, and was glad when at the last moment he turned round and gave her a timid glance of recognition.

At one o'clock there was quite a little stir outside. They were carrying him home on their shoulders. He looked exhausted, but his friends cheered and shouted with glee. The old pensioner, in ragged slippers, ran to meet his son and embrace him. She saw how he scrubbed his greenish-grey goat's-beard against the hero's cheek. From the kitchen at the bottom of the house came an appetising odour of fried sausages. Lilly ran about between the bookshelves clapping her hands, and crying inwardly: "St. Joseph is a brick!"

The next morning Lilly went to order the silver heart, and with blushes requested that the initials L. C. and F. R., entwined, should be engraved on it. When she came back from this errand she found in the letter-box—among subscriber's slips—an envelope addressed to herself. Inside, written on the back of an old menu card, were the words: "Be on the terrace Sunday morning at five."

Grey dawn pierced the chinks of the library shutters. Lilly jumped out of bed and threw up the window. The street looked like a big bowl of milk, the mist of early autumn rose so densely from the ground. The damp soft vapour cooled her burning cheeks, and she held out her arms as if bathing in it. Her thin summer dress, which she had washed and ironed with her own hands the night before, hung on the whitewashed wall like a blue cloud. She had

never made herself so smart as she did to-day ; for a picnic so fraught with fate she must be worthily adorned.

The small sum left out of her savings, after the purchase of her gifts, had been spent on a burnt straw picture-hat with pale blue ribbon strings tied under the chin, and did instead of a neckscarf. A pair of long open-work silk gloves, which she had forgotten all about, were unearthed from the depths of her trunk.

She put the heavy revolver in her hand-bag, after kissing it several times first and murmuring over it :

" Protect him, destroy his enemies, and lead him to victory." Thus she consecrated the weapon dedicated to his defence.

Punctually at five she heard the opposite door open and shut. She slipped out at once, and they met on the terrace. He shook hands. His eyes were haggard, yet there was an expression of energy in them. There was something of the dandy almost in his air and apparel. His hat was tilted slightly on one side. He flourished a bamboo cane in his hand with a silver knob.

Lilly murmured shy congratulations. He thanked her with lofty condescension. The examination was now a very small matter, hardly worth mentioning.

" We are playing the fool now to a frightful degree," he added. " I can't say I find it congenial, but a man must know something of the frivolous side of life as well as the serious."

As they passed St. Ann's, a happy thought occurred to Lilly. It would be delightful to enter the church for a few minutes, and by removing the burden of deception win St. Joseph's blessing on their day's outing. She made the suggestion timidly, and found she had put her foot in it.

" I am a Freethinker, Fräulein," he said, " and have the courage of my convictions. Still, all enlightened people should be tolerant, and if you would like to go in I will wait for you outside."

Lilly felt she didn't care about it any more and blushed for shame and vexation. Of course, he didn't know how much St. Joseph had to do with his success, or he would not have been so ungracious.

They walked on in silence through the still deserted streets of the suburbs. The mist lifted a little. Lilly, chilled to the bone, shivered at every step she took. She thought she shivered from excitement, and yet she was much calmer than

she had expected to be. Everything was so different. What had disenchanted her? She didn't know. She gazed wistfully before her at the trees that appeared at the far end of the street. "Let us only get out into the country," she thought, and clenched her teeth to prevent them chattering.

The silence began to oppress her. She wanted to begin a conversation, but could think of nothing to say. In front of them a baker's boy started whistling on his round.

"We used always to buy hot rolls after we had worked all night," said young Redlich suddenly. "We might buy some now."

Lilly felt happy again. If he had said "We will steal some," she would have been happier still.

The boy was not allowed to sell his rolls. They were on order, but there was a shop open opposite. When Lilly saw her hero come out of the shop with a big bag of rolls under his arm, she had a nice sort of feeling as if they were setting up housekeeping together.

Now they were passing gardens, and showers of drops fell on their heads from the branches. Lilly bent her shoulders and stamped her feet. She was simply frozen. At last they were out in the open fields. Masses of silvery gossamer cobwebs, weighed down by the heavy dew, hung about the stubble, which had grown high; and the outline of yellowish hilltops bounded the circular landscape on one side, while on the other in the distance rose a wall of dark woods. Lilly struck out her arms like a swimmer and breathed deeply several times.

"Aren't you well?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know! I must make up for all I've missed," she answered. "You see, I haven't really breathed for a whole year."

As she still shivered from cold, she started running. He tried to keep up, but soon was left behind, panting and stumbling. When they reached the first hill the sun began to rise over the fields. The undergrowth seemed aflame and the cobwebs glistened like diamonds; the dewdrops glittered like sparks of fire.

Warmed and excited by her run, Lilly pressed her hands against her throbbing heart, and gazed with dizzy eyes into the sea of glowing light. "Oh, look, look!" she stammered, and then turned an appealing glance of inquiry on him.

She had half expected that he would spout odes, sing songs, and, if it had been possible, play the harp. But he stood struggling for breath, and appeared entirely absorbed in himself.

"Do recite something, Herr Redlich," she besought him. "A poem of Klopstock's—anything."

She hadn't got as far as Goethe when she left the Selecta.

He laughed, a short scoffing laugh. "No, thank you," he said. "Now the examination is over, the whole of German literature may go hang for all I care."

Lilly felt snubbed. She had probably done a very ignorant thing in asking him to recite. When she next looked at the view the glow had faded, though the fields still sent up a faint golden haze towards the sun, the face of which had grown hard and indifferent.

They continued their way in the direction of the woods. He swung the paper bag, and Lilly picked blackberries, which hung on the bushes like strings of beads in a filigree of cobwebs. A little further on, close to the outskirts of the wood, they came to a seat; and without discussing whether they should sit down or not they took possession of it. It was just what they wanted. Lilly was a little awed. This was the spot where the soul of a young genius was to be revealed to her, by whose clear vision she was to be guided upwards to the sun. He opened the paper bag, and she laid her handkerchief full of blackberries beside it. The revolver in the bag was put under the seat for the time being. Lilly cut the rolls, scooped out the middle, and filled them with blackberries, and they had a delightful breakfast together.

The magic glow of early autumn cast its spell upon them. Lilly's head swam with delight and longing. She could have thrown herself at his feet and pressed her forehead against his knees to find a support in the approaching joy of fulfilment. He had taken off his cap, and a curly forelock fell over his eyebrows, which gave him a sombre, world-challenging air. The lock of genius had been the fashion in the Upper Prima, and was assiduously cultivated by all who didn't aspire to the smartness of a Students' Corps. His gaze rested on the church spires and towers of the old town, which stood up like sleepy sentinels watching over the clustering roofs of the houses stretching in all directions.



"I wish you would tell me your thoughts," Lilly said in a tremor of admiration. The great, crucial moment—had it come?

Again he gave that short rather scoffing laugh.

"I am calculating how many parsons get their living in a hole like that," he said, "and what a comfortable thing it is to go in for theology."

"Why don't you go in for it?" she asked. "All sources of knowledge have a common fountain."

"You don't understand anything about it, my dear Fräulein," he rebuked her gently. "What matters is not knowledge, but conviction. A man must suffer everything for his convictions; he must drudge and starve for his convictions. The town has in its gift six livings for theological students. But I would rather cut off my right hand than accept one. For your convictions' sake you must go out into the world and fight your way. That is what I am going to do. I begin the day after to-morrow."

His small, short-sighted eyes flashed. He pushed back the lock of genius from his forehead with a trembling hand.

Now he was talking according to her expectations. She wondered if this would be the right moment to present him with the revolver. But she deferred the presentation out of respect for the grandeur and significance of his new mood.

Taking up the bag with the weapon in it, she clasped it tightly, and then aired her sentiments with the same enthusiasm as she had done that night on the terrace.

"Oh, Herr Redlich," she cried, "can there be anything more splendid than to fight like that—to plunge into the ocean of life, to wrest happiness from the grim powers of fate, to become ever stronger and more iron in purpose, no matter how things go against us? Oh, it must be sublime!"

But, as before, her appeal failed to wake any response in him.

"Good heavens, Fräulein, when you come to consider it, of what does the much-vaunted battle of life consist?" he said. "Letting yourself be trampled on, sleeping in a cold bed in the winter, and getting nothing for dinner all the year round. I am going to try it, of course, but it's hard all the same. If I had an income I shouldn't feel so bad."

"And is this all the spirit with which you enter the battle?" asked Lilly.

"Dear Fräulein," he replied, "how can a fellow who starts in life with a few darned shirts and socks, and borrowed money, feel any different?"

"He is the very one who should conquer," Lilly urged, eager to inspire him with her own confidence. "You, with your consciousness of being great and different from other people, are bound to carry all before you."

She waved her arm with an impassioned gesture, which took in the whole prospect before them: the plain with its silver streams and its green trees, the city embosomed in its gardens, perched among its meadows like a lark's nest. She would show him a small symbol of the future kingdoms over which he was to reign.

He nodded gloomily, convinced that he knew more about it than she did.

"Life is hard—hard," he repeated.

She still did not despair of infecting him with her own ambition for his future, and in an outburst of eloquence she went on:

"If only I could express what I feel and know is true—if only I could make you courageous and hopeful. . . . Look what a pitiable creature I am. I have neither father nor mother nor friends. . . . I hadn't even the chance of staying at school and finishing my education. Here I am, without position, money, or even winter clothes. . . . Look at my feet." She thrust out her shabby boots, which till now she had been careful to hide beneath her skirt. "I never have enough to eat, and if I am late home to-day I shall be thrashed. Yet I am certain that somewhere happiness is waiting for me. . . . It is there, in every little breeze that blows in my face—though invisible—in every sunbeam that greets me. The whole world is made up of happiness, really, and of music. . . . Everything is a Song of Songs—a Song of Songs is everything."

She turned away from him sharply so that he should not see how moved she was.

Below in the town the bells began to chime. St. Mary's, which once had been the Catholic cathedral and was now the chief Protestant church, led off with its deep triple clang. St. George's, once the Church of the Order, gave out a clear E G third; on feast-days it added a C. More bells sounded, and among them the modest tinkle of St. Ann's,

unmistakable and insistent, making itself clearly heard in the chorus. To Lilly's ears it whispered, "We know and love each other, and St. Joseph greets us."

Her friend meanwhile had been recovering his mental equilibrium. He assumed his little air of pedantic dignity, feeling that he had got the best of the argument.

"I don't think you and I altogether understand one another," he said. "I have made a deep study of the problems of life, and so see things rather differently from you. I call a spade a spade, and am not taken in by the so-called illusions of youth. I know what men are, and should advise you to be a little more careful in what you do and say."

"What on earth do you mean?" Lilly asked in astonishment.

He smiled with a half-embarrassed and half-superior air as he glanced askance at her.

"Well, you know, beauty has certain dangers connected with it."

"Beauty!" Lilly cried, burning all over. "What nonsense!"

"Those on whom nature has conferred this gift have special reasons to be more cautious than others less favoured. For instance, it is lucky for you that you have fallen in with anyone so correct, old-fashioned, and honourable in his ideas as I am. Another, less steady, more frivolously inclined, might easily, you know, have taken advantage of such a walk as this. You may indeed be quite sure that he would."

Lilly stared at him in dismay. She was overwhelmed in a whirl of far from agreeable reflections. What did he want her to do? Was he reproaching her, or making fun of her most sacred sentiments?

"Oh, good heavens!" she exclaimed, completely losing her composure. "I wish we were at home."

"You mustn't misunderstand me, *Fräulein*," he began again. "I am not a saint. I am fully acquainted with the weaknesses and failings of human nature. I am only offering you a word of counsel, for which you will one day be grateful to me. Principles count for something, and in after-life, if we meet again, you will, it is to be hoped, have no reason to be ashamed of the acquaintance made in your youth."

"Ashamed," thought Lilly. "I ought to feel ashamed of myself now."

She felt all at once that it had been fast, undignified, almost common of her to have proposed this morning walk. Before it had not seemed wrong, why did it now suddenly seem so awful ?

The chimes still sent forth their melody ; the sun still spun a network of gold around them. She saw nothing, heard nothing, so deeply hurt and ashamed was she. She would have preferred to run away there and then, but dared not stir a finger.

He for his part no longer seemed a person in need of sympathy and consolation, but very self-satisfied and proud of what he had done. He removed a blackberry stuck in the lattice-work of the seat, and put it in his mouth.

" It would be a pity to get our clothes in a mess," he said, as he crunched the seeds slowly between his teeth.

Lilly grew more composed and stooped to pick up the bag.

" What is in that ? " he inquired " It looks a heavy thing to carry."

In alarm Lilly clutched it to her heart.

" It's only the door-key," she faltered.

Then they set out homewards.

" If only I could make him change his opinion," she thought, " and think better of me again ! "

The only thing that occurred to her was to gather a nosegay of all the most beautiful wild-flowers she could reach.

With downcast eyes, she offered him the nosegay as a parting souvenir instead of that other gift of which she now could not think without feeling a fool.

He thanked her with a courtly bow and a flourish of the bamboo cane with the silver knob, an heirloom, of which he had only just come into possession.

Lilly was too depressed and humiliated to utter a word.

" Doesn't something tell you," he asked, " that we shall meet again sometime in the future ? "

She turned aside ; it was all she could do to suppress the tears that rose to her eyes.

" If we do," he went on, " I hope I shall prove to you what incessant work and unwavering loyalty to one's convictions can accomplish, even without money."

His voice now vibrated with gleeful self-confidence and importance.

It seemed almost as if, in reducing her to a state of insignificance and despair, he had imbibed something of her former gay courage. When, however, they drew near the old market-place, he became exceedingly uneasy again, as he looked up and down the streets. They were very full now, he remarked; it would be better if they parted here, and pursued their way home by different roads.

He said "pursued," to show that his studies in German literature had not entirely been wasted.

A few days later he left on his travels. The atmosphere was long heavy with the odour of the garlic in the sausage with which Frau Redlich had flavoured her son's soup at parting.

Poor Lilly crouched behind the window curtains with a sore heart, and wished that she had never set eyes on him.

## CHAPTER IX

ONE grey, hazy October morning, when winter's approach was tempered by a muggy warmth, a wonderful thing happened. Frau Asmussen's runaway daughters returned.

Without giving a hint of their coming beforehand, they suddenly appeared in the library, gave Lilly an astonished stare, and asked her to pay their cab as they had no change. Lilly's heart beat with excitement. Directly she saw the two imposing figures of the girls, who, though somewhat travel-stained and jaded, victoriously took possession of the field, she had no doubt who they were. She gave a scared glance at their pretty little snub-nosed faces, out of which their bright grey eyes looked inquiringly from the door of the back room to the door behind which the broom of welcome stood. Its hour had now come, and Lilly ran out in a panic to escape the painful scene that would inevitably follow on the opening of Frau Asmussen's door.

She gathered up from the floor of the cab two faded bouquets of stephanotis, a tartan shawl rolled up in a hold-all, from which two bizarre umbrella-handles, topped with blue glass balls, projected in company with two soiled embroidered cushions and a flask. Besides these, there were a tin box of acid drops without a cover, a cardboard box falling to pieces, and disclosing not only hats, but such miscellaneous articles as a comb and pieces of bread-and-butter.

Lilly, with the things in her arms, paused in the entrance, listening in terror for the sound of cries. But all was quiet, and when she ventured into the room she saw mother and daughters locked in each other's arms, hugging and kissing.

As there was no time before the midday meal to kill the fatted calf, in addition to the ordinary cabbage a huge pile of cakes from the confectioner's was provided as a second

course. The daughters helped themselves to these before the meal began, laying them aside for a rainy day. Frau Asmussen beamed with maternal tenderness and pride.

"Well, did I exaggerate?" she asked Lilly. "Aren't they a splendid pair? Isn't it a wonder that I could do without them for so long? But I mustn't be too greedy; I am only thankful to get as much of them as I do, for I know their filial hearts are torn between their father and me. They cannot bear to pain either of us by absenting themselves." And she seized and patted the hands of the girls sitting on either side of her, and all three exchanged looks of rapturous affection.

The absent husband and father was also touchingly alluded to. The girls said that the lively, talented darling was on the point of giving up his business to manage vast estates in south Russia, where he had been urgently summoned. Later, in a gloomier hour, Frau Asmussen interpreted this announcement as meaning that the spotted scoundrel had to hide himself in the fastnesses of Odessa till the air cleared, owing to some shady transactions of his about bonds.

At first, to Lilly's unpractised eyes, the two home-flown birds appeared as like as two sparrows. Both of them were pert, quarrelsome, fickle, and flirtatious. After a time she learned to distinguish between them. Lona, the elder, she discovered to be the best-looking in a coarse, barmaidish sort of way. Her hard commercial character was also the stronger. She led Mi, who set up for being a wit, by the nose. For the time being their attitude towards Lilly was one of friendly neutrality. So far she gave them no cause to adopt a hostile line, though hints were dropped that if a certain young lady dared to usurp their position she would be taught her place and war to the knife would follow.

When, however, they had satisfied themselves that Lilly was tractable and inoffensive, they made her the recipient of their confidences, which they poured forth late at night as all three girls sat together on the bed, undressing and brushing each others' hair. They sucked contraband bonbons and discussed different styles of coiffure. Now Lilly, whose mind had hitherto remained pure and innocent, was enlightened on subjects she had never dreamed of. They whispered mysteriously of love intrigues and man-hunting, revealed sexual secrets in a stream of sordid chatter.

What they cared for more than anything, it would seem, was to have their figures admired.

"When I turn my shoulder like this, am I not like a Greek statue?" one would ask.

"Isn't my bust like marble?" was another question.

"If I were not so modest, I should like to let down my night gown and show you my hips. They are divine."

Much more rarely did they challenge Lilly's criticism of their features.

"We know we are good-looking; we've been told so hundreds of times. There can be no doubt about it," they would say.

All the same, when the draughts of a chilly autumn necessitated their throwing scarves over their heads in the house, they did not fail to draw attention to the classic way in which their hair grew on their foreheads, and to the fascinating curve of their profiles.

Sometimes they were even severe critics of themselves.

"We haven't fine eyes, we know—yours, for instance, are, strictly speaking, finer. But if *you* were to make eyes at anyone it wouldn't have any effect, whereas if we so much as cast a sidelong glance out of the corner of ours, the men are after us like lightning."

Their small cat's eyes would sparkle with satisfaction in their sense of limitless sway and triumph over the weaknesses of masculine strength.

The advice they generously gave Lilly was summed up in the phrase: "Go as far as you like, so long as you don't make a present of yourself to any man."

They told, without stint, piquant stories, describing exciting and thrilling situations in which they themselves had been true to this motto. There was patent in everything they said a strong vein of coarse sensuality. Once, when one of them remarked, "I should like to be a Queen of the Bees, but have no children," the other, whose temperament appeared to be more given to ethical contemplation, quickly retorted, "I would rather be a nun, only with no morals."

She pursued the topic, shocking Lilly's pious reverence with Boccaccio-like details. In spite of their latitude of thought, all their hopes and dreams were really centred on marriage. Marriage, the speediest and most advantageous possible, appeared to them in the light of a career and salvation from all earthly troubles, the consummation of all heavenly bliss.



That was to say, the bridegroom must be old, he must be rich, and he must be a fool.

They demanded this triple qualification of fate. In the same way as others invested their intended husband with a halo of all the virtues, these maidens revelled in depicting his infirmities, and showing him as the miserable dupe of their abounding power and superior strategy.

They were not always at one on the point as to how this valuable acquisition so indispensable to their happiness was to be obtained, and a favourite bone of contention between them was the question of whether it was expedient or not to compromise oneself before marriage.

Lona, whose daring in dealing with problems of conduct knew no bounds, was of opinion that it was expedient. Mi, who was more cautious and liked to feel her ground, took the opposite view.

"If you knew what men are as well as I do," Lona snapped at her sister, "you'd know that the best way to get hold of them is to make them afraid. . . . Let them sin, and then make their sin a halter to hang them with. Then you've got them fast."

Mi ventured to wonder that Lona had not tried to put the theory into practice; if she had she would certainly long ago have——

Here she discreetly came to a pause, for her sister's fingers looked like scratching.

And, in fact, only eight days after their return, these two did come to blows, and the air was thick with flying hair-pads and petticoat-strings. Mi emerged from the fray with a wound, which Lilly spent the night in bathing with vinegar and water.

The cause of the quarrel was a "swell" who had followed them during their afternoon walk, and who, according to Mi's account, had been put off from making further advances by her sister's discouraging reception of him.

Lona maintained that it was a dangerous principle to take up with "swells," while Mi asserted that he might, at any rate, have been good enough for a husband.

The chief and all-engrossing occupation of their daily routine was parading the streets and getting spoken to by men. Lilly's fears that they might take the reins of management into their own hands she soon discovered were groundless.

They lay in bed till nine, took two hours to dress, and then started for their morning walk, to take stock of the garrison officers who at this time were promenading the town in groups.

The first half of the day being thus devoted to the military, the second half was given up to civilians. Afternoon coffee was, as a matter of course, ordered and partaken of at Frangipani's, where a handful of lieutenants joined city magnates and young barristers at chess or bridge, and where perhaps a solitary schoolmaster, priding himself on his smartness, would put in an appearance and attempt to cut a dash with the rest.

After an hour spent in devouring all sorts of sweets came the twilight stroll, very favourable for making chance acquaintances, and serving as a subject of conversation afterwards in the house.

It cannot truthfully be stated that Frau Asmussen had given this mode of life her sympathy and blessing. It was scarcely likely, considering that the first spell of seraphic calm that succeeded the homecoming of her prodigal daughters had given place to mutterings of a storm, and the storm itself had soon burst. Rows took place in rapid succession and became such a matter of course that Lilly, who had at first wept and howled with the combatants, began to accept them as part of the normal family life. Abusive epithets of extraordinary vigour flew hither and thither, boxes on the ear resounded through the library, and even the broom, the existence of which at first had been ignored, was now introduced into its limited sphere of activity.

Not till the evening, when Frau Asmussen's soothing medicine claimed her attention, was peace restored. The sisters were now at liberty to take more walks, only their sense of propriety forbade them to go out at so late an hour.

"Anyone who met us now would take us for fast girls," they said, "and then it would be all up with marrying."

Indeed, it was hardly credible how many were the rules and restrictions by which these young ladies ordered their apparently unlicensed method of life.

You might be kissed, but on no account must you return kisses. Men might address you by your Christian name and call you "*du*" in conversation, but to write in the same familiar strain would be an unpardonable insult. You

would allow a man to pay for your coffee and cakes, but not for your bread-and-butter. A stranger might press your foot under the table, but should he squeeze your hand you must instantly rise, and so forth.

Lilly had not the slightest comprehension what all these pros and cons meant. Man in the abstract for her, up till now, had been merely a part of existence that had no separate individuality—that passed her in the streets without attracting her notice in the least. The only men she had admired were those who existed in her dreams, in her novels, and imagination. The creature that stared at her from the pavement, that came to get books and found ridiculous excuses for starting conversations with her, that held aside the baize curtain at the church door for her to go out, that smiled over the counter in shops—this creature was something stupid, contemptible, scarcely tolerable, to whom she was utterly indifferent, and to give a thought to whom would be degrading.

She was now to learn that a girl could exist solely for the sake of that gross, coarse thing called "man," that she could think of nothing but him from the moment she got up till the time she went to bed, as if she were created for him, and must put him before her work and faith and God.

Though Lilly knew that she was far above being influenced by the two girls' example and precepts, she could not help feeling a slight curiosity awake within her to learn more of what these creatures were like who caused such a flutter in the dovecot of feminine emotions, whose approval was so keenly to be sought, and whose coldness meant absolute annihilation.

A nervous dread began to torment her about that unknown vortex of wickedness outside, from which dirt was now brought every day and laid at her threshold, and about the timid curiosity that it aroused within her. Whether she would or not, her thoughts were always recurring to the panorama of pictures, painted in vivid poisonous colours and unrolled before her nightly by the two degenerate sisters. It was quite a relief when the hot friendship, after a month's duration, began to cool.

The coolness was caused by an unaccountable deficit, which occurred not once, but many times, in the cash-box, and became a standing mystery. Lilly, in a fever, added up the figures. She counted every pfennig over and over

again ; at last she was forced to conclude that someone had taken advantage of her absence for a moment to open the drawer and dip into the cash-box.

She knew that she would be accused of the theft when it was discovered, so, in order to save herself, she took the key of the drawer with her when she left the room, as if by accident. She repeated the ruse several times till she was certain that she was on the right track, by the change of manner in the girls, who regarded her with increasing scorn and displeasure.

At last they could no longer contain themselves for wrath and disappointment. Did she, miserable interloper, imagine that she was mistress of the business ? they burst forth. She should have both books and keys taken out of her hands if they chose. In her terror, Lilly ran to their mother, and threatened to leave the house on the spot if she was not allowed to have a free hand in the control of the shop as hitherto.

Frau Asmussen, knowing too well her daughters' character, took Lilly's part and the storm blew over. The girls resumed their intimacy with Lilly, and again confided to her the secret depths of their soul. Did she think that they wanted money to spend on ices and meringues at Frangipani's ? She was very mistaken. They were cute enough to lay up for the future. It was impossible to stay for ever with the old tippler, especially as the place had turned out a barren wilderness as far as the prospect of making a good match was concerned. How could Lilly, with her petty ambitions, have any conception of theirs, and of what they suffered, struggling against the temptations of meringues and chocolate cakes at the confectioner's ? They had been saving up for a long time for another journey. They were literally starving themselves for this praiseworthy object.

Lilly remained unmoved. She refused to be wheedled or talked over again, and black looks were turned on her. They began to regard her with an offended air of hauteur without speaking, and approaching events were to fan their smouldering wrath into a blaze.

## CHAPTER X

**I**T was in the twilight of a rainy November day. Every roof dripped, and grey drops slid down the iron railings of the terrace in endless succession to splash into the pools on the pavement below.

It was poor sport to watch them, but there seemed nothing better to be done.

Then the door opened—the bell ringing loudly—and a fair, dapper little man came in, with his coat collar turned up and his hat pulled low over his eyes. He stamped and shook the raindrops off the brim of his hat. His glossy, fair hair shone like satin, and he brought into the atmosphere an aroma of Russia leather and Parma violets. He glanced at Lilly with narrow, arrogant eyes, feigning disillusionment, said good-evening brusquely, and then stared beyond her, as if he awaited a greeting from someone behind the book-shelves.

Lilly asked him what he wanted.

"Ah, I suppose you are the young lady in charge of the library?" he answered, and seemed to find in her existence a subject for careless levity.

Lilly assented, and he exclaimed, "Capital! That's capital!" and from under his blinking light-lashed lids scintillated a thousand little shafts of merriment.

Lilly next asked what book he wanted.

"Do you know, my much-respected and learned young lady, I am not exactly at home in German literature and the other sciences, but since yesterday evening I have been fired with a fabulous, positively student-like thirst for culture. Now, if you would give me your valuable assistance——"

He stopped suddenly, stuck an eyeglass in his eye, looked her up and down, first from the left side, then from the right, as one judges the points of a high-stepping horse before purchase; then he murmured, "Damn!" and asked her to light up.

There was no reason why Lilly should not obey, as it was so dark she couldn't read the numbers on the backs of the books.

As she stretched up to lift the shade from the hanging lamp, disclosing the splendour of her outline, he said "Damn" a second time. When the light shone on her and she looked at him with a questioning shyness in her enigmatic eyes—those "Lilly eyes," whose brilliancy had so long been under eclipse—he sank, quite overcome, on to the chair set for customers, folded his hands and asked to be forgiven.

A hot feeling of resentment burned in Lilly : so contemptible was her position in the eyes of this young aristocrat—the first who had found his way here during a year and a half—that she was not deemed worthy of being treated with ordinary courtesy.

"Unless you wish to borrow a book, sir," she said with a lofty air, "I must ask you to leave this room."

"A book? What?" he repeated, outraged. "One solitary book, one beastly book? No, thank you. Every five minutes I am allowed to stay here, I will take out new books, a whole shelf—a whole case of books, if you like; but on condition that I may return them to-morrow. I will make a contract with a van proprietor to cart the cases of books backwards and forwards. But wait a moment! Haven't you to plank down a three mark deposit if you take out a book?"

Lilly, with a stare of astonishment, said "Yes."

"Well, as I don't happen to have that amount with me just now, you must keep me as a deposit. You see, I give myself up as a sort of prisoner. Awkward for both of us—eh? But what's to be done?"

Lilly could not help being amused, in spite of herself. She laughed out loud.

"Ah! now she has forgiven me!" he exclaimed in triumph. "Her gracious young majesty smiles on me. Now let us chat together like real friends. Just look at me a moment, my Fräulein. Do I appear to you like a fellow who reads much? The only books I care about are Schlicht's, Roda-Roda's, and Winterfeld's—authors who are supposed to know the humours of military life. My object in coming here is not books. May I take you into my confidence?"

"If you must, yes," stammered Lilly, her eyes dazzled by the glint of gold from under the sleeve of his tan overcoat. It was a revelation to her that men wore gold bangles.

"I like to change into mufti of an evening," he went on; "by day, you know, I wear uniform . . . but it won't be for much longer. In a week or two I shall be at a loose end. Debts . . . I say, you don't know what debts are? Happy you! Debts are the bitter dregs in the lemonade of human existence, and this lemonade isn't oversweet at the best. But what was I going to say? Oh, I know! Of an evening I play the part of a Harum al Raschid in order to win the favour of the common herd, by paying a little attention to the daughters of the people. Do you understand me? Yesterday, sauntering in a remote wilderness of wild hedges and new villas, I followed up two young women, ogling over their shoulders, and swinging their skirts, behaving, in fact, as all nice, well-brought-up girls are wont to do——"

"I do not care to continue this conversation," said Lilly, colouring deeply from shame.

"Why not? You, my dear Fräulein, of course, are a perfect lady, and would not descend to anything of the kind. I was only confessing to you in order to gain your absolution."

Instantly Lilly was pacified, and she let him babble on.

"The two young women in question walked in front of me arm-in-arm, but directly I got up to them I slipped between like the sausage between two slices of buttered bread. They became very sociable, and told me that they were the owners of a large circulating library, and intended shortly to open a fancy art business in Berlin, etc. They did not tell me their address, and, as I am ashamed to say that till a few minutes ago I thought they were worth cultivating, I looked up all the circulating libraries in the directory. I find that there are only three besides the leading bookshops, so I have been to two, and now I am at the third. I swear the future proprietresses of the fancy art business may go to the deuce, as far as I am concerned."

Lilly could not suppress a feeling of rising scorn and malicious joy, but she took care not to betray the whereabouts of the two sisters.

Then, to show how completely in the presence of her majestic beauty his desire for a vulgar flirtation had evaporated, he formally introduced himself.

"I am Lieutenant von Prell," he said, "soon to be *ex*-Lieutenant von Prell!"

She gave him an inquiring glance, and he added:

"As I hinted to you just now, Fräulein, my days in the regiment are numbered. This umbrella, which now serves one purpose only, will probably before long be held over my head as a sunshade."

Did he not care for an officer's life any longer? Lilly asked.

"I don't know that there's any kind of life that I couldn't enjoy," he answered, with mirth dancing in his light-grey eyes; "but the paternal exchequer is low, and my pay as a slave in the army is about sufficient to keep me in radishes, and even radishes are dear at Christmas. The best thing I can do is to charter an old herring-cask and get myself pickled. If you can tell me where one is to be got cheap, I'll pay the damage."

Lilly laughed gaily in his face, and he laughed with her, putting his arms akimbo and emitting a thin, soft giggle in an almost inaudible treble, which nevertheless convulsed his too spare figure with hilarious merriment.

They sat down opposite each other, like two good comrades, on either side of the counter; and Lilly devoutly wished this hour could last for ever.

When a maid-servant came in to change a novel for her mistress, he settled himself for a stay by examining the titles of the books and acting as if he were perfectly at home. He held open the door for the little maid-servant when she went out, as if she were a duchess.

Lilly grew more and more amused, and couldn't restrain her laughter.

"Before another subscriber comes in, you must go," she said, "or people will talk."

"Why? let them talk!"

But Lilly was firm, and he began to plead earnestly with her.

"You know, gracious Fräulein, I enjoy the reputation of having no moral sense whatever. I want you to be my support and anchor through life, at any rate till the door opens next time. While I sit here I am safe from playing the fool, and this fact I am sure must be cheering to your benevolent heart."

So it was agreed that he might stay till the bell went again.

He sat back comfortably in his chair, and regarded Lilly with an air of possession.



"All earthly troubles can be traced to talking too much," he began. "If Columbus had kept the secret of the discovery of America to himself, no unpleasantness would have arisen. I intend to be cleverer, and to keep my discovery a sacred family secret between you and me. It would be nuts to other fellows. But let them stick to twilight moths, like the two future art-shop proprietresses to whom I am indebted for my budding friendship with you."

The sisters had been forgotten by Lilly. It was about their time for coming in. What if they were to open the door at this minute!

The bell tinkled. It was not they, however, but an old maid who devoured every day a volume full of strong "love interest," and came in the evening for more.

The volatile lieutenant remembered his compact. He started up from his seat and composed himself to speak with a business-like air:

"Will you kindly let me have the last new book of——" he hesitated, evidently at a loss to think of the name of a popular German author; then, after racking his brain a moment, he added, "by Gerstäcker?"

Lilly fetched him this newest of new novels, bearing the date 1849, and he counted out his three marks deposit, made an exaggerated bow, and took his leave with little devils dancing between his light lashes.

A little later the sisters came in. They glanced suspiciously at Lilly's flushed cheeks, and passed on without saying anything.

Nothing happened for the greater part of the next day, but Lilly was full of excited premonitions, like a child before its birthday. She felt on the threshold of new experiences. She was scarcely surprised when at last the door opened and two slim and elegant youths entered. They lisped "Good-evening," and asked her to recommend them a book to read, in a tone of mingled diffidence and self-assurance, while they measured her with the stare of expert judges.

Lilly's limbs grew numb, as they usually did, when she was conscious of being observed and admired. Yet she retained her dignified manner, and when the visitors had selected their trash without looking at it, and attempted to engage her in jocular converse, she drew herself up and took refuge behind the bookcase L to N, which was her shelter when she sat in the window busy with her accounts and ledgers.

The young gentlemen, after a whispered consultation, took their departure in silence.

He had betrayed her then—her lively new comrade. And henceforward Frau Asmussen's shabby library became the crowded resort of tall, slender young men of fashion, all animated by a passion for reading and a desire to exchange one trumpery old novel after another.

Only a few dared come in uniform, but they did not shrink from signing their names in full in the subscribers' book, which took on the appearance of a veritable *Almanach de Gotha*.

Some assumed the cloak of business-like severity, others came in careless certainty of victory. One began love-making on the spot, another had the impertinence to bandy risqué jests over the counter, the most ingenuous of them went the length of asking on what day he was to be honoured by a visit.

Lilly soon saw that there was nothing particularly injurious or flattering to her in these attentions. She chatted innocently with those who treated her politely, took no notice of the impertinent, and directly a conversation seemed to be drawing out to too great a length, she retired behind the book-case L to N.

It did not take the Asmussen sisters many days to discover the aristocratic intruders. Their jealous fury exceeded all the bounds of decency. Every possible insult was hurled at Lilly, and she was abused like a pickpocket. Unheard-of expletives were poured on her head in a filthy stream.

The daughters demanded of their mother that Lilly should resign her place at the counter to them. When this concession was refused, they resorted to physical violence. Frau Asmussen came to Lilly's rescue in her extremity. The broom rained heavy blows on the white night-jackets of the furious maenads, and drove them into the back parlour, where the battle ended in torrents of tears. But hostilities continued, and, if a curb was put on emotions during the hours the library was open to subscribers, all the more unbridled was their rancour in the evening. Lilly's life became a hell on earth. Her soul grew encrusted with a hardness and bitterness that filled her with both dismay and satisfaction. Only at night, when she buried her face in the pillow, did her defiance melt and her wretchedness find relief in silent weeping.

The merry comrade with the light eyelashes, who had caused the whole uproar, kept away. Not till a fortnight after his first visit did he turn up again. He came in with rather a halting gait, and his eyes were swollen and watery.

"These are picotees or clove carnations," he said, undoing a tissue paper parcel in his hand, "which last longer than any parting pangs."

The sight of him brought a little comfort to Lilly, and she took the bouquet as if it was something to which she had a right. Then she reproached him for not having held his tongue.

"Didn't I tell you," he explained serenely, "that I haven't a vestige of moral sense?"

He went on to tell her that he had finally left the regiment and been fêted by his fellow officers at a farewell dinner, and now there was nothing to be done but to take his passage somewhere. The question was, where? "Still, we needn't bother our heads about that yet," he went on; "brilliant folks such as you and myself are bound to have brilliant careers. My path in life will lead me by cool streams of champagne through streets paved with *pâté de fois gras*. That is Kismet, and should it end in a fruit farm in Louisiana, I don't mind. Something new is always interesting. In the meantime the old colonel is dead nuts on me, and wants me on his estate as a sort of Fritz Triddelfitz."

He laughed his curious, almost inaudible laugh, which convulsed his slight form.

Lilly asked who "the old colonel" was.

That she shouldn't know seemed to him inconceivable.

"Is it possible that you live in this world and have never heard of the old colonel?" he asked. "The old colonel is the almighty; the old colonel decides what is good and what is evil on this earth; he ruins one man and pays another's debts with equal ease. He is the great receptacle for all our virtues and all our sins. Above all, the old colonel is eternally a boy. If he were to see you he would say, 'Come along, little girl. I am a hoary-headed old monster, but I want you'; and then your courage will only permit of your saying, 'When do you want me, your high and mightiness?' You see, my dear child, that is the old colonel. They have put him on your track long ago, and if he finds his way here, Lord have mercy on you! It will be all up then with my beautiful young queen."

"But I still don't know who the old colonel is," interjected Lilly, feeling a little uncomfortable at his mysterious prognostications.

"Then don't ask," he answered, and held out his freckled hand in farewell. "It's really a pity," he added, blinking at her through his half-closed light eyelashes with tender compassion. "We might have given history another famous pair of lovers."

He leant over the counter. "As I am a man totally devoid of any moral sense, may I borrow a kiss before I go?"

Lilly laughed and held up her mouth in reply.

He kissed her, and then dragged himself stiffly to the door.

"I can't run," he said. "Last night's banquet has made me a bit lazy," and he was gone.

The same feeling of uneasiness, which Lilly had felt after her lively comrade's first visit, took possession of her again. She felt as if someone was playfully lashing her with switches. Her anxiety caused her torment mingled with pleasure. It was as if behind a closed golden door her unknown fate crouched ready to spring on her—its prey.

## CHAPTER XI

**T**HE midday December sunlight made the hilt of a sword and the buttons of a uniform glitter in the street outside.

"Some one fresh," Lilly thought, for the upright bull-necked figure of the man clanking up the terrace steps was unfamiliar to her.

An imperious stamping before the door, and the bell sounded more sharply than usual. No, she had not seen this person before. Here was no frivolous young lieutenant, nor one of the maturer officers, who were on their dignity till the first shy smile told them how far they might go. Here was a piercing falcon eye, set in a circle of crow's-feet, an aquiline high-bred nose, prominent cheek-bones with a fixed red colour; a small hard firmly closed mouth, which smiled with cynical benevolence under a bristling moustache, a chin—highly polished from shaving—retreating in two baggy folds behind a high military collar.

She saw these details with a heart throbbing so violently that she had to lean against a bookcase for support.

"This must be what I have been feeling so frightened about," she said to herself. "This is the dreadful old colonel."

He raised his hand to his cap in careless salute without taking it off.

"Colonel von Mertzbach," he said in a voice the harsh sound of which suggested unlimited authority and power. "I must speak to you for a few minutes, my Fräulein. There are reasons that compel me to make your acquaintance."

Lilly felt that she was to be subjected to a humiliating cross-examination, which she was not in the least bound to tolerate. But never in her life had she seemed to herself so utterly defenceless as at this moment. She was standing before a judge who had taken on himself the right to pardon or condemn her according to his pleasure.

She murmured something like consent with trembling lips.

"You appear to be a most dangerous young woman," he said. "You have turned the heads of all my staff; that is to say, the juniors among them. They are simply crazy about you."

"I don't understand your meaning," answered Lilly, gathering courage as well as she could.

"Humph!" he ejaculated, and glued his eyeglass into his eye, to look her up and down as far as the point where her figure was cut in two by the counter. "Humph!" he repeated. Then he continued: "In these cases it is easy enough to play the innocent. Nevertheless, I can fully sympathise with my young men. In their place I should probably have done the same. But it looks, Fräulein, as if, in spite of your youth and inexperience, you have a fair share of feminine wiles at your command, otherwise you would scarcely have drawn these somewhat fastidious young men here so often with that immaculately reserved manner of yours; but, after all, perhaps it's the manner that's done it."

Tears rose to Lilly's eyes. She could easily have flung back his insults, but the man's personality mastered her. She searched in vain for words to oppose him; his piercing eyes seemed to go through and through her and deprive her of speech; his cynical smile held her in thrall. So she merely sat down and cried. He on his side rose and came nearer the counter.

"How much you have reason to feel hurt, Fräulein, in your *amour propre*, I cannot say. It's not my intention to make you cry. On the contrary, I want you as calmly as possible to give me a little information about yourself. It may be of importance to your future."

Lilly felt the necessity of pulling herself together, because this man desired it.

She wiped her eyes and looked at him penitently, sniffing a little as she used to do when a child after being scolded.

He inquired her name, her antecedents, whether she had a father and a mother, what school she had been at, and what she was doing there. On her mentioning her guardian's name a mocking smile flitted over his face.

"I am acquainted with that gentleman's philosophy of life," he said. "You are, then, utterly alone in the world?"

Lilly said "Yes."

"And you would not object to have a helping-hand extended to you by someone to whom you could turn in time of trouble?"

Lilly did not think there was any likelihood of such a person turning up.

"I will think it over," he said, frowning. "Anyhow, you cannot stay for ever in this hole. Do they treat you well?"

"Pretty well," Lilly answered; and half laughing, half crying, she added, "I don't get enough to eat, and sometimes I am——" she was going to say thrashed, but stopped in shame, and said "punished," which hardly stated the case.

The colonel burst into a laugh, which sounded like the crackling of a whip.

"Greatly to your credit to be able to take a humorous view of the matter," he said, and he rose to go. "I have ascertained what I wanted to know, Fräulein. My young men may continue to come here as much as they like. In the whole town they could not find more irreproachable society. Should any of them forget themselves, and not treat you with proper respect, just communicate with me. But I am sure there will be no necessity. I wish you good-day, my Fräulein."

Lilly looked after him, and watched the heavy cavalry swagger with which he crossed the paved terrace. The winter sun seemed to be shining with the sole object of illuminating his figure and dancing on his accoutrements.

He looked back at her window when he reached the street, and saluted courteously, giving her as he did so a searching, almost threatening, glance from beneath his knitted brows. Then he vanished.

Lilly's mind was now besieged by the following questions: "What did it mean? What did they want her to do? Why couldn't they leave her in peace?" She would have liked to cry and lament and be pitied. But, deep down, there was a festive note, almost a note of vanity in her feelings. She congratulated herself on her new hopes. Had he meant when he asked her if she would like a helping hand, a prop and stay in trouble, that he would be that prop and stay? It soothed and did her heart good to think of it. Perhaps he was to be the guide and protector so bitterly needed in her stumbling young life? He might perhaps relieve Herr Pieper, who didn't trouble himself about her, of his guardianship.

Perhaps he wanted to adopt her himself? There was no knowing. If only his eyes hadn't pierced like daggers, if he hadn't laughed so mockingly and given her that evil look at the last! And then she remembered the warning of her lively comrade: "If he finds his way here, the Lord have mercy on you."

What nonsense! As if anything could happen to her behind her counter, of which no one had ever dared to raise the flap and come on the other side; and how safe she was behind the bookcase L to N, where she couldn't even be seen.

The visit of their colonel to the library seemed to have damped his young men's ardour; in spite of the permission given them, perhaps because of it, none of them put in an appearance during the next few days. Lilly asked herself if this was a sign of the protection he had promised to exercise over her. But something was the matter with her; she scarcely knew what.

One morning, a week later, the younger of the sisters, who, in expectation of some love-letter, kept watch for the postman, threw an envelope on the floor at Lilly's feet, with the exclamation, "A 'coronet' for you, you officers' hack!"

This, coming from the sisters, was quite a mild form of address.

Lilly opened her letter and read the following:

"MY FRAULEIN,

"Will you allow me on the strength of our recent interview to make the following suggestion? I want a private secretary and reader. Are you open to accept the post? As I am not a married man, you could not of course reside in my house, but I would undertake to find a home for you in a respectable and suitable family. I have consulted your guardian, and the plan has his approval.

"Yours truly,

"VON MERTZBACH.

"Colonel commanding the — Regiment of Uhlans."

Ah, here it was at last! Happiness—happiness standing on the other side of the snowy street, beckoning and calling to her: "Come out of your vault, out into the world. I will show you life, and something new." "Something new is always interesting;" had not her lively comrade said so?



Then she pictured herself seated at the colonel's big writing-table. The colonel dictated to her, and all the time his eyes pierced her through and through, and searched, always searched, and her pen fell from her hand. She wanted to jump up and run away, but she could not ; his eyes held her in thrall.

She sat down and wrote a correct little note declining the offer. Though she appreciated the honour he did her, she felt she was not qualified for so onerous a post, and that it would be wiser to remain in her present position, which, though not altogether happy, was one of which she was capable of discharging the duties. She signed herself, " Yours in grateful esteem, Lilly Czepanek."

So that was over. Now things must go on in their old groove, peacefully, if the wicked sisters would allow peace.

Christmas was approaching, but it cannot truthfully be said that the preparations for the festival at Frau Asmussen's were marked by much rejoicing and good-will. She grumbled at the bad times, and the ridiculous custom of giving all the world presents. Her daughters argued shrilly, and at every opportunity, the question as to whether refined and superior girls like themselves were called upon to gather round a Christmas tree in the company of common minxes! There were none of those treasured little mysteries on foot, which at such a time bring joy and gladness into even the saddest and most poverty-stricken of homes.

Lilly knitted her mother a brown woollen cross-over, bought her two picture puzzles and a wooden flower vase—china being forbidden—and sent them with a box of chocolates to the lunatic asylum.

Her thoughts just now often wandered from her mother to her father, who had now absented himself for more than four and a half years, and had given no sign of his existence.

In her loneliness Lilly clung to a hope of his reappearance. On Christmas Eve, between six and seven, he would be sure to come in, his great-coat covered with snow, and embrace her with the demonstrative affection peculiar to him. She could almost smell the perfume from his burnished locks. Or, if he didn't come himself, he would send a messenger-boy with a preliminary greeting and a mysterious parcel full of costly silks. And a winter hat, too ; for that was what she wanted more than anything.

When the others had gone to bed she took from the

bottom of her trunk the score of "The Song of Songs," and hummed over to herself her favourite airs. There were many passages in it that she could never sing without tears. In these days she was constantly in tears, notwithstanding that there was all the time a hesitating earnest of happiness dawning faintly on her horizon.

It was an exquisite vague sense of being lifted up, a growing of wings, a listening in wonder to inner voices, which sounded as familiar and gentle as a mother's, yet strangely prophetic and solemn.

Sometimes she found herself on her knees, not praying but dreaming, with arms outstretched and fascinated eyes lifted to the lamp, as if from that region of light the foreshadowed miracle was to come.

Thus she celebrated her Christmas feast in the sanctuary of her soul, and the actual Christmas Eve drew nearer and nearer.

At the last minute, with groans and moans, a few presents were mustered. Lona and Mi ran about wildly from shop to shop making their purchases. They even bestowed a few civil words on Lilly, who recognised their kindness by looking the other way when Lona hovered round the cash-box. She knew exactly how much, or rather how little, was inside, and that if there was anything missing it wouldn't ruin her to replace it out of her own purse.

Before supper she was called into the back parlour, where the Christmas tree stood alight on the table—apparently shy of itself.

The sisters shook hands with Lilly, and Frau Asmussen, sitting already over her medicinal glass, delivered a few platitudes on the significance of Christmas, and expressed her regret at not being able to spend it with her excellent husband. Then everyone apologised because the presents were not hand-somer. At first it was the feeling that you were expected to give something, that it was your duty to give, which had disgusted these generous souls who thought giving should be spontaneous; then, when they had got over this feeling, it was too late to buy anything worth having, not that the red check overall apron wasn't decent enough, and the penwiper was not so bad either—considering business was slow.

"I am ashamed to say I have nothing at all to give," Lilly answered. But what she was most ashamed of was that she was once more on friendly terms with the Asmussen sisters.

"I have no strength of character, not a scrap," she told herself as she crunched a piece of marzipan, which the elder and worst of the sisters had given her.

The library bell rang loudly, and a man, loaded with parcels, was asking if Fräulein Czepanek lived there.

Lilly's heart bounded. "From papa—it must be from papa!" she murmured in jubilation.

For a few minutes she scarcely dared trust herself to touch the parcels. She skipped round them aimlessly tidying her hair. Only on the sisters' exhortation did she undo the strings. With what envious eyes the two girls looked on!

Such beautiful things came to light. A faced-cloth dress, lace-trimmed, a delicate blue foulard, a pink silk petticoat, shoes of glossy patent leather and tan suède, six pairs of gloves, three pair elbow-length, all sorts of jabots and cravats, a fichu of Brussels lace to wear with Empire frocks, pocket-books, stationery, bonbons—more and still more things; even the sorely needed winter hat was included, a soft fluffy grey beaver in a picture-shape, that always had suited her noble style of features. It was trimmed with ribbon and ostrich feathers.

Altogether it was quite a trousseau.

The faces of the two sisters grew longer and longer. Lilly herself ceased to be delighted. She began rummaging in wild anxiety through the boxes for a clue to the sender, a letter or card. She had long ago abandoned the idea of her father having come back to heap on her such generous gifts. Yet an instinct of self-preservation made her keep up the deception.

At last, at the bottom of the glove-box, she found a card. She ran away to read it in the library. Under the hanging lamp she scanned, blanching with fright, the visiting-card of "Baron von Mertzbach, Colonel in Command of the — Regiment of Uhlans." Beneath his name he had written in the thick stiff handwriting she knew already, "With good wishes to his lonely little friend from his own lonely hearth."

She went back to the parlour where the sisters, green with envy, received her with a chilly smile, while Frau Asmussen muttered enigmatical phrases over her steaming glass.

"They really are from papa," Lilly said, and wondered why her own voice sounded so toneless.

The Asmussen sisters laughed jeeringly, and began putting the things away in the boxes.

Lilly held in her hand a little china bonbon box, filled to the brim with curious, rich-looking and fragrant-smelling sweets. She glanced from one sister to the other, uncertain as to whether she might dare offer them some of the sweets. She was afraid they might refuse with an abusive epithet, so she let fall the lid, which represented a cupid in a garland of roses, and buried the *bonbonnière* in the depths of one of the boxes. Then she crept away to bed in her corner and cried bitterly.

The sisters went on whispering together for a long time. They built the boxes up into a tower on the library counter, and then haughtily made a *détour* so as not to come in contact with them.

The next morning Lilly called a passing messenger, and sent back the whole pile of packages to the donor without a word. Afterwards she went to the sisters and said:

"It wasn't true what I told you last night. Papa didn't send the things, and I have returned them."

The two girls, who had intended to make themselves agreeable to her in a malicious sort of way, could not conceal their disappointment.

"I should never have taken her for such a ninny," said the younger.

"She is not so simple as you think," scoffed the elder, true to her character of scenting out ulterior motives, "only very designing. She wants to drive her admirer still more distracted, but she'd better take care she doesn't outwit herself. The stupidest man can soon distinguish between what is genuine and what is put on." As if to illustrate what genuine simplicity was like, Lona drew her petticoat tightly round her limbs with one hand, drew her night-jacket decorously together over her bosom with the other, and, tossing her head, cast a look of withering scorn over her shoulder at Lilly, displaying all the virtuous indignation that exalted natures sometimes betray.

In spite of this, Lilly noticed that the sisters' manner towards her had changed somewhat. She was evidently of more importance to them than she had been before, and they refrained from offending her.

Nothing much happened during the next few days, with

the exception of a few of the young officers resuming their visits to the library. They exchanged their books hurriedly, and were extremely correct in their behaviour. None of them seemed inclined now to sit on the counter or on the back of a chair in a free-and-easy attitude.

On New Year's Eve, Lilly was the recipient of a second note. It ran thus :

" MY FRÄULEIN,

" You have grossly misconstrued my motives in sending you a small remembrance at Christmas-time. Matters must be cleared up between us. I would rather divulge the plans I have in mind for you verbally. But, owing to my position, I cannot very well call on you again. If you have your future at heart, come and see me to-morrow sometime in the evening. I will expect you up till eight o'clock. I give you my word of honour that you shall return home in safety.

" Yours,

" MERTZBACH."

Should she go or not go ? The question kept Lilly awake the whole night. If only she could rid herself of that feeling of dread, the fear that robbed her almost of breath at the very thought of him. What might not happen if she stood face to face with him again ? She decided not to go, knowing all the time that she would go.

She lived through the day in a kind of stupor. Towards evening she asked Frau Asmussen's leave to go to New Year's Eve Benediction. The two sisters exchanged significant glances, but to-day they were too occupied with their own affairs to pay much attention to Lilly's.

She put on her old felt hat, battered and discoloured by exposure to many a shower, and her winter coat, which was so shrunk it made her look narrow-chested. Pull the sleeves down as she would, nothing could make them reach to her wrists.

If she had thought of the matter at all, she would have thought twice about going so shabbily clad to call at a grand house. But she didn't think. She felt as if she was doing nothing of her own accord. Strange, mysterious powers were pushing her hither and thither, like a pawn on a chessboard. Unseen hands helped her to dress. They loosened the plaits

on her neck, unfastened the tight buttons of her coat so that her contracted chest should have room to show its young contour, and painted her cheeks, wan from want of sleep, with a rich glow of excitement and triumph.

Not till she stepped out into the frosty air did she feel properly awake.

"Where do you want to go?" a voice asked within her. "I might go and see St. Joseph," she answered herself.

But she did not go to St. Joseph. She made a wide circuit round St. Ann's, crossed the market-place, where she saw the Asmussen sisters sitting in Frangipani's with two admirers, escaped a gallant follower with difficulty, and then suddenly found herself in front of the latticed shutters of the house where, up four flights of stairs, the whirring sewing-machine had ground the last shred of reason out of her poor, ruined mother's head.

There was a light in the windows of the attic where she had once lived. Probably someone else sat there now, slaving day and night, night and day, at the drudgery of making cheap underclothes. Perhaps one day she too would sit there, regretting bitterly her lost youth, as if it had been a crime.

"If you have your future at heart," he had written.

And now she turned and ran—ran for her life, and didn't stop till she stood on the threshold of a brilliantly lighted house, before which a freezing sentinel with drawn sabre paced up and down, as he kept guard over the most important dignity of the town.

"Where are you going?" asked the voice again. For answer she sprang up the wide carpeted stairway and ran into a lackey with silver braid on his knee-breeches. Without speaking, he quietly took her umbrella, while a slight malicious smile flitted over his imperturbable countenance.

Softly, white doors flew back before her, lights with rosy shades like magic flowers shed soft radiance, lovely bare-necked ladies with diamond tiaras looked down smiling on her from gilded oval frames.

How quiet and beautifully warm it was in these spacious rooms; on that thick soft carpet one might lie down and go to sleep. . . . If only that feeling of fear would not clutch at her throat, her brain, her temples, gripping them as in a vice.

Another door flew open. Green duskiness lay beyond, like the interior of a dense forest on a summer day, and out of the dusk his figure came towards her, broad, imposing, clanking. . . . Her hand was taken in his and she was drawn into the green twilight. Dark walls of books rose on all sides, and from somewhere came the flash of deadly weapons, helmets, and coats of mail.

She could not trust herself to look at him. Even after she had been seated some minutes in a high-backed carved oak chair, which projected over her head like a canopy, she had not given him a glance. She heard his voice, the reverberating harshness of which seemed mellowed now to the rolling notes of an organ.

Nothing that she saw, felt, and heard smacked of the earth, yet neither was it heaven nor hell. It was like a terrifying phantasmagoria where human souls floated, vacillating dully between misery and happiness.

At last the sense of the words he was speaking penetrated to her understanding. There was nothing at all unearthly about them; on the contrary, they dealt in a practical way with the return of his Christmas presents, which he still considered hers, and had stored in a cupboard to await her gracious acceptance.

Lilly shook her head with a mechanical smile. She could not find courage to utter a protest.

"And now, my dear child," he began again, "you may ask what induces me, a man getting on in years, to pursue you with all the ardour of a youthful lover?"

When he said "getting on in years," she involuntarily looked up. There he sat, with the light of the green-shaded reading-lamp full upon him, with the orders on his breast giving forth a golden radiance. The silver fringes of his epaulettes quivered at every movement like small snakes. He radiated the same glory as those haloed figures of saints in churches, tricked out in their draperies of gold and brocade.

Lilly's eyes dropped in shame and confusion before so much splendour.

"My object in looking you up that day," he continued, "was to inquire into the cause of a dispute that had arisen among some of my younger officers. It promised to be rather a serious affair, and I was compelled to take steps. I expected to find a little flirty shopgirl, and I found—well, to put it

shortly—I found you. You will perhaps go on to ask, ‘What of that?’ for you cannot yet be aware of what your power is, or rather what your potentialities are, for with you, my dear Fräulein, all is in process of development. I am what is called a judge of women, and I can see in what you are to-day what you may become to-morrow if—and remember a great deal depends on this ‘if’—if your development is directed into the right channel. To stay where you are now would simply be your ruin. Have the courage to entrust your fate to me, and I can guarantee all will be well with you.”

His tone was calm and paternal, at least so it sounded to Lilly. Feeling a little reassured, and with a hope for her future leaping up within her, she ventured once more to look at him. This time, through the shimmer of gold and silver, she beheld a pair of penetrating glassy eyes fixed on her full of eager inquiry.

Again she became a prey to paralysing terror. She sat speechless and shuddering.

“Whatever I do,” she thought to herself, “it will be no good. He will get his way.”

“I have a fine old place,” he went on: “Lischnitz in West Prussia, not far from the Vistula, where military duties do not allow of my going often. A well-bred middle-aged lady, a Fräulein von Schwertfeger, keeps house for me there. If you paid Lischnitz a visit, I can promise you beforehand that she would welcome you with open arms. Under her chaperonage you would have excellent opportunities of developing into what I foresee you will be in the future. In this way you would be provided for, and I should have the great satisfaction, when I come backwards and forwards, of finding my home brightened by youth and beauty.”

He had risen, and in the excitement of conversation walked about the room with short swaggering steps, and at every step his medal and his epaulettes tinkled and jingled like sleigh-bells. At last Lilly heard nothing but this metallic clinking, and ceased to grasp what he was saying.

When he had finished speaking, he paused in front of her, so near that she could smell the scent of the hairwash he used.

She leant back in her chair feeling somehow as if she were going to be bound hand and foot and carried away beyond the reach of help. She knew that she would neither scream nor resist, so completely was she in his power.



"Look at me," he said.

She tried to, she was so obedient, but she could not.

He put his hand under her chin and gave her head a backward tilt, but she kept her eyes almost shut, and saw only the scarlet border of his military coat.

And then she felt herself suddenly begin to sink; the red border went up to the skies . . . all round was the buzzing of bees . . . and then nothing more.

When she came to herself, there was something wet and cold on her breast, and a woman's print skirt, with a smoky smell, brushed her face.

It was still green twilight. A breastplate hung opposite her, reminding her of a scoured and brightly polished kettle. She felt so comfortable, she didn't want to stir.

A rough, bony hand struck her forehead and a kindly voice murmured over and over again: "Poor young thing! poor child!"

Lilly, thinking it was time to give a sign of returning consciousness, moved, and the strong hand slid under the back of her neck and propped her up, and the kindly voice asked what she would like to do.

"I want to go home," said Lilly.

"That can't be done this minute," said the voice, "because he gave orders that he must speak to you again before he goes. But take my advice: just say 'Thank you' and 'Good-bye,' and be off as fast as you can. This is no place for a young girl like you."

Lilly sat up and arranged her collar. It was the cook bending over her, with her rugged, weather-beaten, thick-lipped face full of compassion.

She asked Lilly, as she patted her shoulder, what she should bring her as a pick-me-up—egg and wine, or a liqueur.

"Nothing, thank you," Lilly answered. "Let me go home."

"You shall, my dearie, but I must call him in first."

She shuffled to the door, and Lilly reached for her hat, on which she must have been lying, for it was more out of shape than ever.

"I shall have to get a new one now," and she tried to calculate how much she could afford to give out of her narrow means.

The door opened and he came in, followed by the old cook. Lilly was no longer frightened. . . . Everything seemed far, far off—he too. Nothing seemed to matter.

"Now she's ready to be put into a cab," suggested the cook.

"Your presence here is not required any more!" he thundered at her.

The cook ventured to mumble an objection.

"Go!" he roared. And she scuffled out.

Lilly's sensations were now only those of languid fear.

"I wonder what he means to do with me?" she thought. Her own fate scarcely interested her at all.

He paced up and down, the silver spurs on his heels clanking.

"We must have some light," he said. "Clearness is essential to the matter in hand."

He rang for the man-servant who had smiled in that sly, mocking way. The man lighted the jets of the chandelier and retired, with a sidelong inquisitive glance at Lilly—but no smile this time.

She was still sitting on the couch where she had been when she regained consciousness. Her mind seemed a blank as she twirled her old felt hat round and round.

In the brilliant light cast from the ceiling she saw the colonel in all his resplendence, still silently brooding, as he paced up and down.

She could look him quite calmly in the face now. "It's useless to try and defend myself," she thought, "so I don't care what he does."

Next he seized a chair and planted it in front of her, so close that when he sat down his knees nearly touched hers.

"Listen to me, child," he began, his words ringing out clear and incisive, like words of command. "While you lay here in your swoon I was thinking over in the next room very earnestly what's to be done. I came to a decision about your future; but of that later. You, of course, must have observed by this time that my sentiments with regard to you are not exactly paternal. The older I grow the less am I able to understand what so-called paternal feelings are. To cut the matter short, I have conceived a passion for you which astonishes myself. . . . If I were ten years older—I am fifty-four—I should attribute it to senility. Do you know what that means?"

Lilly shook her head. She could see his face now so clearly that to her dying day she could never have forgotten what it was like.

His eyes flamed in their red sockets and pierced her with the rapier-like sharpness that had at first filled her with terror. In grey bristling strands his hair was brushed back from the temples ; but his moustache, on the other hand, was coal-black, and shadowed his gloomy mouth like a patch of ink through which his teeth made a white line of demarcation. From the corners of his mouth the heavy folds of flesh descended into the collar of his uniform.

"How funny it is," reflected Lilly, "that I am doomed to be the love of this bad old man!"

Well, if it was his will, she was powerless to resist.

"The world could tell you that I am reputed to be, in spite of my years, a subduer of women ; it may be because I have never had much respect for them. But now comes a case which . . . how shall I express it ? . . . a case that is somewhat unique. I have decided that before the old year dies I must make up my mind one way or the other." He looked at the clock. "I have still half an hour to give you, then I am due at a reception. Well, not to waste time, I may as well confess . . . my intentions towards you in the first place were not honourable. To say that I wanted to seduce you would hardly be correct, considering how little there can be of a seductive nature about a man of my years. It wouldn't have been here, and not to-day, as I gave you my word of honour in my letter ; but you would have been mine sooner or later, of that you may rest assured."

"I've no doubt of it," thought Lilly, who listened as calmly as if she were reading an exciting novel. Still, her old horror of him did not return ; and still she waited with dull curiosity to see what would happen next.

"If you had resisted and shown fight, all the more certainly would you have been overcome. I am an old hand, you know. Then came your fainting fit, which gave me some insight into your disposition. I was forced to admit to myself that a conquest by force in your case would give me no satisfaction. You are made of noble stuff, and I do not require a languishing companion. . . . Whimpering mistresses have always been my abhorrence. I don't care to have my comfort disturbed by scenes. I have had experiences of the

kind, which I am unwilling to repeat. So while you lay here being tended by my cook, I came to the conclusion I had been on the wrong tack. I resolved to adopt another course."

Lilly was overcome with a pleasing sense of gratitude, as if she had been the recipient of an enormous benefaction. "How splendid of him, how kind," she thought, "to let off a poor stupid thing like me!"

She cast a stealthy glance at his hands, which, long and yellow, hung listlessly between his knees. She would have liked to imprint a kiss on them to show how grateful she was, but shame deterred her; she was almost sorry that so glorious a man didn't want to have anything more to do with her.

"Well, I took further counsel with myself," he continued, and his voice sounded sterner, as if steeled by the force of his resolution. "It was not altogether a new idea; I had often, indeed, thought of it. But it seemed ridiculous at first, and only to be resorted to as an extreme measure—a way of escape which I am now cutting off. Finally, I asked myself, why shouldn't I? I am not ambitious. I know too well the rotten machinery of diplomatic and military service; it's not worth while to give one's sweat and blood to oil the wheels. So the idea of resignation doesn't displease me. Of course, I should have to retire in the circumstances, perhaps anyhow, because there are mornings when I can hardly sit on my horse from the pain caused by that cursed sciatica."

"I wonder why he is telling me all this?" thought Lilly, and felt flattered that so distinguished a man should discuss such important matters with her.

"What is more fatal still for me is that I foresee the rising of a whole generation, thirsting to be revenged on the robbery that has been perpetrated at its expense. Naturally, the unflinching eye and the firm hand can accomplish much. . . . In either case, one must dare something. Well, my dear child, what do you say?"

Lilly was silent, ashamed of being so stupid that she was not in the least able to follow him. It all sounded to her like double Dutch.

"Well, will you . . . or not?"

"Will I what?" stammered Lilly.

"Good God! All this time I have been asking you to be my wife," the colonel replied.

## CHAPTER XII

**T**HIS was the moment in which Lilly's hopes and wondering astonishment reached their climax. Could it be Lilly Czepanek to whom all this was happening, or had she changed places with someone else—some heroine who only lived inside those old brown-covered books, and who would cease to exist directly the last page was turned? He did not urge her to consent at once. As she sank back in a helpless heap, incapable of speaking, he took her hands tenderly in his, and with the smile of a beneficent deity, reasoned with her more gently than she could have believed possible. She might think it over, he said, for three days, or he would even allow her ten. So long he could be patient, but she must promise in the meantime to say nothing about it to anyone.

She gladly acceded, still too terribly ashamed to look him in the face.

Then she ran home and cried and cried without knowing why she cried, whether for joy or for grief. She was still sobbing when towards four in the morning the sisters, who had relaxed their strict etiquette in honour of the New Year, crept in and passed through the room.

When she got up in the morning she was sure that he could not have been in earnest, and that before the day was over he would send to say that he had changed his mind. She wouldn't care much if he did. Indeed, she would breathe more freely and thank God to be relieved from a haunting burden of perplexities.

At ten o'clock there was a ring, and a basket of roses was handed in. The size and costliness of the blooms filled the sisters with astounded disapproval. They knew the price of roses in winter, and calculated that these had cost a sum greatly exceeding Lilly's wages for a month.

"Really," remarked the elder, "I cannot see why you shouldn't give in to such a gorgeous admirer. If it was one of us, it would be different, of course. We are in society, and could not afford to lose caste. But you, a mere shopgirl without any family to disgrace, why shouldn't you? Besides, such a life has its charms and advantages. If I were you, I should certainly try it."

The younger and more sentimental of the two protested. "The first step," she said, "should only be taken for love. That is what is due to yourself, even if you are nothing but a shopgirl."

They were still debating this knotty question when they went off to New Year's parade. They wanted to see Colonel von Mertzbach in command of the guard. They had heard he was "awfully handsome," and that all the fashionable girls in the town were setting their cap at him.

Lilly caressed her roses and would have kissed them all, only there were too many.

Then she took courage, locked up, and went out to St. Ann's to consult St. Joseph. She would have met the officers riding to parade if she had not turned down a back street in the nick of time.

High-mass was over, and had left an odour of incense and poor people lingering in the aisles. A few worshippers remained praying at the side altars. Lilly knelt down before her dear saint, pressed her forehead against the velvet padding of the altar railings, and tried to pour out her torn heart to him, begging for advice and consolation.

"Ought I to . . . May I? Can I?" Oh! She hoped she might so very much. Such a chance was not likely to come more than once in a lifetime. She would be rich, a baroness, with the world and all its splendours at her feet. When did such things happen outside fairy-tales?

If only one thing about him had been different. For the first time it struck her clearly what that one thing was.

It was not his eyes, whose glance was a dagger-thrust. It was not the grey bristly hair on his temples, nor the harsh commanding voice of the martinet. No; now she knew that it was none of these, but the folds of skin hanging down from his chin to his throat. It was these that must always form a barrier between him and her. They couldn't be got over, nothing could conceal them. She shuddered at the thought

of them. And yet the Asmussen sisters had talked of him as a handsome man. The daughters of wealthy and distinguished people were said to run after him.

It would have been folly on her part to refuse him. Wasn't he the best and noblest and most high-principled of men? Wasn't he nearly as good and kind as God Himself? Then she mapped out a future in which she was to live and breathe only for him; to sit at his feet as a disciple. She would flutter about him in gayer moments like a dove, though she could not exactly picture herself being ever lively in his presence. But she might be poetic; she might gaze at the stars in the distant firmament and the evening clouds, and look the image of a pale, noble, saintly creature to whom young strangers would lift their eyes in devouring longing without being rewarded by a single glance from her. All this would be possible, because her life would be consecrated to him, who was her friend, protector, and father, to whom she looked up on the heights whence no gleam had ever descended to her before.

"Yes, I will—I will!" an eager voice cried within her. "Yes, dear St. Joseph, I will!"

For answer St. Joseph held up a warning forefinger. Of course, he would have done it in any case. He couldn't help himself, for his artist had presented him thus. And yet there was something disconcerting about that raised forefinger. It didn't somehow help a poor distraught human being on its way through this troublesome world.

The next day Lilly got a letter from Herr Doktor Pieper, making an appointment with her at his office.

She turned hot and cold. "He knows," she said to herself.

When she asked leave to go, Frau Asmussen remonstrated severely with her.

"You receive costly presents and flowers, and you are always wanting to go out; if you continue like this, I am afraid I shall have to offer up daily prayers for you again."

But when Lilly showed her guardian's letter, Frau Asmussen gave her permission. Lilly had not seen him since that day, a year and a half ago, when she had come out of the hospital, so weak she could hardly stand. She had been too shy to accept his invitation to call on him again. Besides, there had been no reason why she should. From time to time a lanky, dried-up looking person, whom Lilly recognised as the head

clerk, had come to Frau Asmussen's, and after a brief conversation conducted in an undertone, departed. This was the only sign that the man under whose guardianship she had been placed ever thought of her existence.

"Herr Doktor Pieper will see you now," said the head clerk.

As Lilly entered, the distinguished lawyer was sitting at his writing-table in the same position as she had last seen him. He raised his head and contemplated her with a long scrutinising gaze. Then he smiled and rubbed the mirror-like surface of his bald patch. "Ah! So it's you!" he drawled.

Lilly's respect for this man deprived her of breath. While he studied her from head to foot as if she had been a marketable object, she made an awkward movement, which was a cross between a nod and a bow, and tugged at the short sleeves of her coat.

"Ah! I perceive, my child, that you have developed into something that makes masculine folly, not of course justifiable, because we are endowed with masculine intellect to restrain the tendency, but, at any rate, excusable. . . . But I haven't wished you good-morning."

He rose and offered her his cool flabby hand, which felt as if it had no bones in it.

"Please let me look at your gloves," he said next.

Lilly trembled, and drew back her elbows like a thief caught in the act. She stammered out, growing very red, "I was going to buy a new pair to-day."

"Don't, dear Fräulein," he answered, smacking his lips with satisfaction; "those holes are touching, and awake sympathy. Your winter coat, too, awakes sympathy. These are mere matters of detail, which contrast piquantly with the main features of your appearance. Anyone sentimentally inclined, even if he were not born a poet, might easily be inspired to an outburst of lyrical verse by such a pathetic appeal."

As he spoke, he put his arm familiarly through hers and led her to an easy-chair, upholstered with many springs and cushions.

"Sit down in this victims' chair," he said, "though I promise you there will be no drawing of teeth to-day. Altogether, you've done very well for yourself, my child. I am perfectly satisfied with you."



He smoothed his well-kept fair beard and showed his teeth in a satisfied smile, like a conjurer after performing a specially clever trick.

"When do you intend the wedding to come off?"

"It's not even an engagement yet," murmured Lilly.

"Oh, as far as that goes, there will, of course, be no engagement, properly speaking—that is to say, no formal announcements to friends, cards, visits, and other courtesies. Have everything done as quickly as possible—as quietly as possible; that is my advice to you, Fräulein. You see, in the very delicate situation of affairs in which we find ourselves, adverse influences are always to be feared."

"But I haven't so much as said 'Yes,' yet," Lilly ventured to put in.

This seemed vastly to amuse him.

"Ho! ho! We're assuming the possibility of a refusal, are we? A refusal! Very clever! I shouldn't have credited you with so much capacity for business, dear Fräulein."

"I am sure I don't know what you mean," said Lilly, a flush of indignation rising to her face—she knew not why.

He thrust his hands against his sides and continued to be amused.

"Yes, yes; that's all very well and practical, but a joke can be carried too far, you know. I advise you to leave it in my hands for the time being. . . . I understand these matters, though I must confess I haven't often handled so important a case. I will do my utmost to hurry on the wedding. . . . For reasons already stated, I must demand absolute secrecy till his resignation is a *fait accompli*. When the bans are once put up, providing you with a trousseau will be a minor consideration. My advice to you, young lady, is to behave for the present in as maidenly and ingenuous a manner as you can. A rosebud unfolding with the freshness of the dew upon it should be your example. But I would suggest the use of a better soap. . . . I think there's no room for improvement in anything else. The necessity may arise for you to take up your abode with another family, in which case the sum realised from the sale of your mother's effects—one moment, please." He opened a big ledger which he took from a rack by the writing-table. "A, B, C—ah, here we are—Czepanek. Sums amounting to one hundred and thirty-six marks will come in very usefully just now. My purse,

too, out of a purely aesthetic enjoyment of the romance, is at your disposal. So much for the period before the wedding. As for the time to follow, which is of infinitely greater importance, I should not like you to go away from here without my giving you a few gentle hints, though, unfortunately, I am not in a position to"—he paused for a moment, and a satyr-like grin widened his loose-skinned cheeks—"take a mother's place and impart to you the precepts with which she would speed you on your way as a bride."

Lilly understood this time well enough what he would imply, and red-hot shame wove a fiery mist before her eyes.

"In all matters connected with arrangements for your future, such as insurance, settlements, alimony in case of divorce, provided you are the guiltless party—or even, if you were guilty—you may implicitly trust me. I was not made your guardian for nothing. But there is one contingency, very common in marriages such as yours, in which my professional help can give you no security. You must keep your eyes open for yourself. . . . We are placed in this world, my dear child, to do what we like; anyone who says the contrary would rob your heaven of its sun. But I give you a threefold warning: first, don't exchange superfluous glances; second, don't demand superfluous rendering of accounts; thirdly and lastly, don't make superfluous confessions. You cannot be expected to-day, perhaps, to understand clearly what all this signifies"—as a matter of fact, Lilly understood nothing at all—"but think of my words when occasion arises. They may be of use to you. Let me see. Another thing! Are you fond of jewels?"

"I have hardly ever seen any," said Lilly.

"Not at the jewellers' in the market-place?"

"At school we weren't allowed to look in at the shop-windows," Lilly answered.

He smiled his most unpleasant smile. "Then I venture to advise that every time you and your husband go out together you stop and look in at every shop-window. Such little hints are seldom ignored. Be specially charmed with pearls, my dear young lady. You will in this wise lay up for yourself treasures which, when your time of trouble comes—and, remember, it will come—will be of invaluable assistance to you."

Lilly nodded, and thought to herself, "I shall certainly do nothing of the kind."

Herr Doktor Pieper passed his soft plump well-kept hand over his glossy bald patch several times, and continued:

"Well, what more have I got to say to you? A good deal, but I am rather afraid of being misunderstood. There is one thing, however, which must not be omitted. The early days of married life, no matter what its nature may be, are apt to have a disturbing effect on the nervous system. When you first feel depressed, take bromide. In fact, take a good deal of it. Draw a protective cap of indifference over your head in moments of strong excitement, whether caused by love or antipathy, so that you will not see, hear, or feel anything. You must deaden your perceptions and be unconscious of your will-power. In time you will become used to the oppressive hot-house atmosphere, probably in a few months; and afterward you will again breathe the fresh air, and then, instead of the bed-canopy above you, there will stretch again before you the heaven of your girlhood. When one's nerves are over-strained it is dangerous to think too much of one's immediate surroundings and to seek compensation there. Dream rather of the distant blue mountains. Let your happiness linger afar off. You are young, and it will certainly draw nearer as years pass. Give it time to grow up. . . . I expect you do not understand the very least bit what I am saying?"

"Yes, of course I understand," Lilly stammered.

She didn't wish to be thought stupid. But he was right. His words rained on her like hailstones of which she could only gather a few here and there—except the blue mountains. She had caught that, and liked the expression.

"Never mind," he went on. "Something of what I have said will occur to you, I've no doubt, at times. Now I come to the last and most delicate point of all, because it deals, as it were, with spiritual conditions. Don't fret if your environment does not respond to you and echo your ideas. You must leave it, and not try to make things different. Bells that are cracked can never be made to ring in tune again. Rather provide music for yourself. I shouldn't be surprised if you have a whole orchestra at your command."

"I have 'The Song of Songs,'" Lilly thought with pride.

"You have no conception, my child, how essential it is,

when you live in harness with another human being, not to lose touch with yourself. To hold a private court of your own flattering thoughts is an excellent diversion. Anyone who wants to eat fresh eggs must keep poultry; never forget that. But don't let anyone suspect. Display no unnecessary opposition, no obstinacy. You must arrange to run your life from the start on double paths, so that you can travel in both directions as your needs require. I shouldn't wonder if in these circumstances your marriage were to turn out happily, apart from its exceptional worldly advantages, the duration of which depend mainly on good luck and the exercise of tact and powers of adaptation. I shall send you the marriage contract sealed. Till your coming of age in two years' time I shall always be at your service. If you feel in after years that your temper is permanently tried, break the seal by all means. A good lawyer can interpret a contract very differently from a layman, and read all sorts of things into it. As I indicated, there is one case in which he is impotent to do this. Be on your guard against it. Technically, it is called *in flagrant*. . . . Sometime or other you will doubtless acquire information as to what the word means. Now, may I give the colonel your final consent ? ”

## CHAPTER XIII

THE train rumbled on through the night, showers of sparks flew up from the engine. When it was fed by the stoker, clouds of fire illuminated the darkness, and you saw in a flash purple pines, snow-covered gables, and wide-stretching golden spaces appearing out of black nothingness. How beautiful, how strange it all was!

Lilly leaned her head, drowsy from champagne, against the red velvet cushions. It was over, and everything had gone off well. A kaleidoscope of confused pictures, half real, half imaginary, whirled through her brain. She saw a great black inkstand with a small grey-bearded man behind it asking lots of useless questions; a white lace veil with myrtle-leaves attached thrown over her head by the adjutant's wife, who went from one rapture into another; a hateful Protestant minister, with two ridiculous white bibs under his chin. He looked like a grave-digger, but at the end he gave such an exquisite address that Lilly would have liked to cry on his bosom. Two gentlemen in black, two in gay uniforms. One of the gentlemen in black was Herr Pieper, one of those in uniform the colonel. And she was the colonel's wife—the colonel's wife! How the wheels seemed to murmur the words: "Colonel's wife!" But if you listened more attentively they also said—what the gentlemen at the wedding had said—"Most gracious baroness; most gracious baroness," always in time.

The ice-cream had been so wonderful—a positive chain of mountains with peaks, and pinnacles, and little lights that shone through the crystals. She could have sat admiring it for ever, only she had to dig into it with a big golden spoon, and so overturn a whole mountain. She had asked him if she might have ice-cream every day in the future, and he had

laughingly answered, "Yes, if you like." She must have been rather tipsy, or she couldn't have had the courage to ask such a question. She would find an opportunity of begging his pardon later.

Now he sat opposite her looking her through and through with his piercing eyes. That was the only thing that embarrassed her, and if she hadn't been such a coward, she would have asked him to look the other way for a change. Not that she felt her old fear of him to-day. Of late she had gradually become more at home with him; how could it be otherwise when he was so kind, and she had only to express a wish to have it fulfilled instantly?

Then there was something she had noticed that she would never dare breathe to anyone. He was bow-legged. They were the heavy cavalry legs all over, rather too short for the imposing figure they supported. They made him sway in his gait from side to side as if he were trying to walk on a tight-rope. You noticed it even more when he wore mufti and stuck his hands in his pockets as he was doing now.

Every now and then he leant forward and asked, "Are you all right, little woman?"

She should think she was "all right" indeed! All her life she would like to sit there leaning back against the red velvet cushions, looking at her new soft *suede* gloves, and the shiny toes of her patent-leather boots peeping out from the hem of her travelling dress.

There had been quite a crowd at the station. No uniforms, because he had dispensed with a military escort, but plenty of ladies had been there, thickly veiled, trying to appear unconscious, as if their errand at the station was an ordinary one. As she passed them on the colonel's arm and got into the *coupé*, she had caught two or three admiring remarks—and not from too friendly lips. It came back to her now with heart-felt satisfaction. At the very last moment two bouquets had flown in through the window, and she had looked out again. There stood the Asmussen sisters, bowing reverentially and crying buckets full. Her colossal good fortune had disarmed their envy and changed ill-feeling into a sort of melancholy rejoicing.

And, opposite, sat the man who had worked the extraordinary revolution in her lot. For a moment she was so overwhelmed with a feeling of well-being and gratitude that she

went down on her knees before him, and, clasping his hands in hers, gazed up at him in adoration.

*But when he caught her to him with one arm, and with the other caressed her, she became frightened again and retreated to her place. He let her be with a smile, conscious that his hour was not far off.*

And it came sooner than she had expected. "Get ready," he said abruptly; "we shall be getting out directly."

"Where?" she asked, startled.

"At the junction, from where there's a loop line to Lischnitz."

"Are we going to your estate, then?" she inquired anxiously. He had talked of going to Dresden.

"No," he replied shortly; "we shall stay here."

Then they stood on a dark platform with their trunks and bags. The frosty haze cast rainbow halos round the few dim gas-lamps, and shadowy forms were enveloped in clouds of their own frozen breath as they emerged into the light. The train steamed out of the station.

There they stood and no one heeded them. Then the colonel uttered one oath after another. He had acquired the habit of swearing violently at drill, when irritated. His fury fell on Lilly like a thunderclap, and made her tremble, as if she were the culprit. At last the colonel's oaths reached the ears of the station officials, who associated them with something familiar in the past, and they began contritely to make amends for their negligence by loading themselves with the luggage. They got into the hotel omnibus which was waiting, and Lilly squeezed herself into the furthest corner of it. Weird shadows flickered from the miserable little oil carriage-lamps, on his sharply defined features, giving him a new aspect, beneath which his long-slumbering wrath still seethed.

"What has this dreadful old man to do with you, or you with him," Lilly asked herself, a shiver running through her, "that you should be at his mercy so completely? Why not rush past him, tear open the door, and leap out into the night?"

She pictured what would happen if she acted on this impulse. He would stop the omnibus, pursue her, calling and shouting after her, and, if she was so lucky as to hide herself, he would set the police on her track. The next morning she would be found cowering under an arch asleep, perhaps frozen to death.

At that moment he stretched out his hands, groping for hers, as people in love are wont to do. The shadows dissolved and she responded to his caress, wreathed in smiles. Yet on their arrival at the hotel, where the proprietor, waiters, and commissionaires received them with deferential bows and an effusive welcome, Lilly's thoughts, in the midst of all the bustle, light, and warmth, reverted again to flight.

"I'll say I have left something in the omnibus, run out and never come back."

She was already ascending the stairs on his arm.

A spacious, awe-inspiring apartment swallowed them up. It had a flowered carpet and a glaring three-armed chandelier. In one corner stood a huge wide bedstead, covered with a smooth white damask counterpane. It was carved at the head and foot. She looked round in vain for a second bed. "St. Joseph!" she breathed to herself.

The colonel made himself perfectly at home. He grumbled, turned up the lights, and tossed his overcoat into a corner. Then he lit a cigarette and threw himself down on the sofa, whence he watched with the eye of a connoisseur her movements as she reluctantly took off her coat and drew the pins out of her hat.

There was a knock, and a waiter came in with cold refreshments and a silver-necked bottle on a tray.

"More champagne?" questioned Lilly in alarm. She had not yet recovered from the amount that she had imbibed at midday.

"Nothing like champagne," he said, "to give a little woman courage to consecrate the pretty blue silk *négligé* waiting in her box to be unpacked."

He poured out the foaming liquid into the two glasses. She clinked glasses with him obediently, but scarcely touched a drop of her wine.

When he rallied her on her abstinence, she answered pleadingly, "I don't want to be tipsy on such a sacred night as this!"

Her reply seemed to entertain him immensely. He burst into hilarious laughter, and exclaimed "All the better! All the better!"

He would have drawn her to him, but, as every touch of his caused her acute discomfort, she evaded him quickly and said, "I must look for my *négligé*."



She knelt before the box, which she herself had packed the night before, lifting out the trays, and produced from the depth a garment of filmy lace and washing silk, which he, with all the other beautiful clothes, had bought for her before the wedding.

She looked round in search of a sheltering alcove into which she could retire to change, but there was none—no escape from those eyes, almost softened by their desire for her, watching everything she did. Shuddering, she stood there, clinging helplessly to the collar of her dress, which she hadn't the courage to unhook.

He grew impatient and sprang to his feet. He nearly caught her in his arms, but the imploring look she gave him was so full of pathos that he chivalrously desisted, and stooped instead to pick up something which, in her search for the *négligé*, she had turned out of the box on to the floor. The next minute Lilly saw a white roll between his dark fingers.

"It's 'The Song of Songs,'" shot through her brain.

With a cry she hurled herself upon him, and tried to snatch the roll of music from his grasp, but his fingers were like iron. He defended himself and repulsed her attack with ease, laughing all the time. She was beside herself at the thought that her life's secret should be tampered with by strange hands, and she cried, implored, and beat him with her fists.

Now the matter began to appear to him in a suspicious light. Doubts began to rise within him as to the unblemished purity of her soul, and even of her body.

"Be careful, my little girl," he said. "Prevarication and deceit are out of the question now. You will kindly let me see what this is without delay, or I'll pin you down so that you can't stir a limb."

"Oh, please, dear colonel," she begged and prayed, "give them up. They are only two or three sheets of paper covered with music, the music of songs—nothing else, I swear. Please let me have them, dear colonel."

Her innocent pleading touched him, and the comical unconscious humility of her "dear colonel" made him laugh again. Besides, as the daughter of a professional, she might cherish musical ambitions.

"Do you compose yourself?" he asked.

"No, no, no! It's not my composition, but don't look at

it," she entreated, " or I'll jump out of the window. I swear I will by all the saints."

He was so delighted with the picture she made, her eyes wide with alarm, her hair loosened and dishevelled, the tragic mute expression on her sweet childlike face with its clear-cut features, that he wanted to prolong the struggle for a few minutes. So he looked very black and pretended to be what he really had been a little while ago—full of jealous suspicion.

Then she fell on her knees, and, clasping his legs, she whispered in a voice half suffocated by her emotions of shame and distress :

" If only you give it back to me, I won't mind what you do. I won't attempt to defend myself."

The bargain struck him as advantageous.

" Your hand on it," he said.

" Yes, here is my hand on it," she replied. " And you'll never ask any questions ? Promise."

" Not if you swear by your blessed St. Joseph that it's really nothing but music."

" Yes, nothing but music and the libretto, I swear."

He gave her the roll, and she yielded herself entirely to him . . . sold herself at the price of " The Song of Songs " to the man to whom she already belonged.

The early morning sunlight, shining straight in her eyes through the yellow striped curtains, awoke her. She felt herself resting on a sort warm pillow, and was conscious of having slept splendidly. Slowly it dawned on her what had happened. She leaned over to him with the intention of giving him a kiss. He lay with his head thrown back and his mouth open, and the light from the window played on his shining bristled chin. Over his haggard cheeks little red and blue veins ran in all directions like rivers on a map. His ink-black moustache glistened with pomade, and his eyelids were so wrinkled into folds that they must, it seemed, have reached down to the top of his nose if they had been ironed out.

" He's not so bad-looking," Lilly thought to herself ; but she omitted the kiss.

She got up noiselessly and dressed herself without his moving. The old cavalry officer was a sound and heavy sleeper.

Lilly scribbled on a sheet of notepaper which she found in the hotel blotter : " I am gone to church," laid the note on

his pillow, and slipped down the stairs, past the porter, who was so astonished he forgot to say "Good-morning."

The streets of the little town still slept in the peace of the late winter dawn. The snow had been swept from the middle of the road into heaps along the gutter. A party of crows sat in a circle round the frozen fountain in the market-place. From the distance came the faint music of sleigh-bells. Down the main street boys with satchels were loitering to school. In some of the smaller shops lights still burned and apprentices were sweeping and cleaning the steps, their faces blue with cold. As Lilly went by they stared hard, or called to others inside to come out and gape after her.

The swinging tread of marching footsteps was behind her. A long train of infantry, wearing gloves but without cloaks, came tramping along in the middle of the road. They puffed, in regular time, clouds of frozen breath before them. Their eyes with one accord turned to the left in Lilly's direction as if by word of command. The officers, walking beside their men, exchanged significant glances and shrugged their shoulders.

She had not far to look for the Catholic church of the parish. The clumsy stone fabric, with its remnants of Gothic bricked over, stood high above the roofs of the town. The side aisles were crammed with altars in barbaric colours, much gilded and adorned with paper roses in cheap vases. She could not find St. Joseph anywhere, and had to be content instead with Our Lady of Sorrows, between whom and herself relations seemed strained.

A feeling of oppression and emptiness, which she could not explain, took possession of her soul. It was as if she had done something wrong and didn't know what. She knelt down and gabbled her prayers so thoughtlessly that she felt ashamed, then she caught herself absently eyeing with contentment her *suede* gloves, which moulded her fingers with such perfect ease and distinction. Every now and then a shudder ran through her, which made her shut her eyes and clench her teeth, and then she felt ashamed again.

Soon she gave up attempting to pray, and gazed up at the Mother of God, with her tearful face, who appeared to be saying, "Please take these things out of me." Yet the seven swords piercing her heart were set at the hilt with pearls and precious stones.

"If only I was really unhappy, I should have some excuse," thought Lilly. "Then I might talk with her as I used to with St. Joseph, and the swords in my heart would be costly to behold." As costly as the pearl necklace he had put round her neck just before the wedding.

She saw herself as she had been two months ago, when she had stolen out in the grey dawn to lay her poor distraught heart at the feet of her favourite saint; how soon, with the reaction of youth, she had walked on air again, intoxicated at the thought of what was coming to her in the fair future. And all the time she had been actually steeped in poverty and wretchedness, forsaken and friendless.

"Happiness takes on strange aspects," she thought, and she gave her shoulders a petulant little shrug.

Then suddenly a great dread came over her that those times would never come back, that she must go on like this eternally, barren in soul, disturbed in spirit, persecuted by gloomy, inexpressible fears.

"It must all come of not loving him enough," she confessed to herself.

Now she knew what she had to petition of the Virgin Mary. She bowed her face in both hands and prayed long and fervidly—prayed that she might learn to love him with as much passion as she had blood in her veins; with as much devotion as she had hopes of her soul; with as much joyousness as there was laughter in her heart. And, lo! her prayer was answered.

She rose from her knees with shining eyes, a burden lifted from her soul, and hurried away, back to him to whom she belonged, to serve him with all humbleness and confidence, either as his daughter, his handmaiden, his mistress—in any capacity he wished.

## CHAPTER XIV

THEY passed Berlin without stopping, because the colonel had no desire to encounter his military friends so soon after his *mésalliance*. From here in three hours they reached Dresden, and took up their quarters at Serdig's, where the hotel proprietors had arranged to provide the newly-married pair with the comforts and privacy of a home. Drawing-room, bedroom, and dressing-room were all they needed, for the closer their outer intimacy the nearer would their inward relations approximate. And, indeed, the colonel had every reason to be satisfied with his honeymoon. He, who in the course of his not too short life had held hundreds of girls on his knee, who thought he knew every type through and through, the sweetly clinging, the coyly coquettish, the brazenly bold, the sham and the true, and all their different kinds of kisses—this old amorous hand, who ought to have been surprised at nothing, was simply full of incredulous amazement at his last lovely find. In his whole carefully cultivated career as a *roué* he had never come across so much yielding and so much pride, so much fire, ready wit, and quick understanding, so much naïve simplicity, as were comprised in this one dreamily smiling Madonna-faced child.

Perhaps he was most taken aback and puzzled by her utter unpretentiousness. When they dined *à la carte*, she invariably selected for herself the very cheapest items on the menu, and would ask if she might have lemonade to drink with as much shy modesty as if she were making a love confession.

Once, on their way back from the public gardens, when they wandered home through queer little back streets, Lilly, who resolutely declined as a rule to look in at shop-windows, stood transfixed before a small greengrocer's. The colonel, on inquiring what interested her, elicited gradually that she loved

eating sunflower seeds, and would he mind very much if she bought some ?

The more he loaded her with presents, the less able did she seem to realise that money was being spent on her account. So long had been the dearth of money in her life, that now she had no discrimination as to the value of it. However big the sum he placed in her purse, she did not hesitate to hand it out to the first beggar they met. But when he paid a flower-girl two marks for a rose she thought it wicked extravagance.

Once when she had tickled his fastidious palate beyond belief by her *naïveté*, he asked in sudden distrust, " I say, little woman, are you acting ? "

She didn't know what he meant, and with the wide melancholy eyes of childlike innocence, which she used to turn on him at such questions, she replied, " Acting indeed ! Since papa went away I haven't seen any acting, or been inside a theatre once."

The same day he took a box for the play, and she danced about the room with the little blue tickets in her hand, half mad with delight. But her joyous enthusiasm was somewhat damped by being told that the occasion demanded evening dress. It was incomprehensible to her that to appreciate Shakespeare's " Winter's Tale " you should be obliged to bare your neck and shoulders. The evening gowns, besides, seemed far too grand for her. In selecting one to wear, she hovered round them with their glittering, jewelled trimmings and exquisite lace as gingerly as if they were a bed of nettles. In a generous mood the colonel had ordered the gowns, for no particular reason, for to take Lilly into society as yet was not to be thought of.

When she came to him dressed, stiff and stern-eyed from embarrassment, yet glowing with a feverish joy in her finery, taller and more of a budding Venus than ever, her delicate rounded breast half hidden in a mass of soft lace, the fabulously beautiful chain of pearls on her swan-like throat, the elderly robber went into such ecstasies over his booty that he was near ordering the finery back into the wardrobe, and throwing the theatre tickets into the waste-paper basket ; but she implored him so fervently to keep his promise that he thought better of it and got into the carriage with her.

Then, he, who imagined he had long ago outlived the commonplace vanity of delighting to show off his possessions

in public, experienced a triumph. The *blasé* old bachelor found himself enjoying the sensation of being envied, and, though he accepted it disdainfully as a matter of course, he was tremendously flattered.

Directly Lilly entered the box she was the cynosure of all eyes. Everyone speculated as to what the relationship could be between this extraordinarily handsome and distinguished pair, and when after the first act a thousand tongues of light leapt out again from the ceiling, opera-glasses were levelled at them, and a hub bub of questioning comment passed from mouth to mouth.

It was the first time Lilly had ever witnessed a play from a box, and her first instinct was to hide herself at the back, but she had already learnt blind obedience to his commands, and when he pointed to the chair beside him she meekly subsided into it. Then, as she became aware of the universal notice she attracted, that strange numbness and feeling of detachment came over her. It seemed to her when she moved, smiled, or spoke, someone else was doing it all—another person with whom she herself had only a chance connection.

Not till the lights were lowered and the curtain went up again did she awake from her lethargy. Then she followed the poet into his enchanted realms with breathless excitement and delicate thrills of suspense. After this two Lillies sat in the box—one Lilly in blissful self-oblivion flitted through heaven and hell on the rainbow wings of her childhood's phantasy; the other, like a wound-up doll, made stilted gestures and strove unconsciously to imitate the manners of the well-bred, feeling all the time a hot sweet torturing sensation creeping over her, the intoxication of vanity.

Afterwards the colonel, not satisfied with his triumph at the theatre, instead of having supper as usual served upstairs, went with Lilly on his arm into the public dining-room where an Hungarian band was playing, and elegant people supped and displayed their fine feathers. Here the little drama of the box was enacted over again, save that Lilly, carried away by the wild dreamy melodies of the violins, let her awkward shyness drop from her, and expanding a little, with flaming cheeks and shining eyes, dared to play her small part.

Opposite them, two tables further on, sat a fair young man, with expansive white shirt-front and black tie, like all the

others. He stared at her with unflinching persistence, as if she were some rare wild animal.

She writhed under the fire of this gaze, that caressed and hurt her at the same time and spoke a foreign language to her with the violins, the notes of which quivered down her spine and throbbed feverishly through her being.

Suddenly her husband turned round and caught the admirer in the act of staring. He pierced him with his dagger-like glance to such effect that the fair-haired man speedily rose and disappeared. But the colonel's pleasure seemed spoilt. "Come, it's late," he said, and led her away.

As soon as he had her to himself again his pride in his treasure broke out anew. It became a sort of unbridled frenzy. Lilly had to undress, as she had often done before, and pose in numerous attitudes, both classical and the reverse. Then, to wind up, she was compelled to don the silver-spangled gauze garment, which he had bought for her during their first days in Dresden, arrayed in which he liked her to dance to him before going to bed. The metal threads sent ice-cold shivers down her limbs, and pricked her skin like needles, but as it was his wish, and his wish was law, she made no demur.

In bed he lit another cigarette, and while she sat on the edge of the bed he amused himself by telling her risqué anecdotes, which he described as "his little girl's lullaby."

After this, the colonel preferred to take meals regularly in the dining-room. He wished to enjoy to the full the piquant pleasure of seeing his young wife openly admired and unblushingly desired. The value of his property seemed to rise in proportion to the extent that he was envied by others for its possession.

And Lilly, for her part, could watch for the intoxicated sensations of that evening to awake in her ever anew. She might under drooping lids see and feel all those young, hot pairs of eyes around her hang burning on hers, full of hopeless passion and desire; might, accompanied by the sad wail of the violins and the clash of the cymbals, take flight into those Elysian fields whither her road had been barred—she knew not how or why—since her great good fortune had come to her.

¶ Never did she dream of permitting herself, even by the quiver of an eyelash, to return any of those ardent glances. The young men who gazed at her were only accessories



to the scene, as indispensable as the lights, the band, the flowers, the white tablecloths, and the cigarette smoke which rose to the ceiling in little blue columns.

Nevertheless, one day, as she was walking arm-in-arm with her husband in the street, one of those glances shot her through the heart like an arrow. It proceeded from a pair of dark eyes, which even from a distance were fixed on her inquiringly, and flared up as they came nearer into a flash of melancholy fire and recognition.

She felt as if she must run after him as he walked on, and ask, "Who are you? Do you belong to me? . . . Do you want me to belong to you?"

Then she committed the indiscretion of turning round to look at him. It was only for the fraction of a second, but her husband had remarked it, for when she again looked in front of her, she felt his vigilant eye was upon her, full of threatening suspicion. He nodded two or three times as if to say, "So it's come to this already." For the rest of the day he was preoccupied and bad-tempered.

The incident was but the first of a series for Lilly. Not that she ever met that identical youth again, though she kept on the lookout for him. He was succeeded by innumerable others. Those she met, from this time, were no longer unsubstantial shadows of a vision she saw as if they were not there. Now, when she beheld a slight youthful figure coming towards them, she wondered what he would be like near, and if he would look at her. And should his aspect please her, and his gaze without being impertinent express admiring astonishment and longing, she would often feel a pang at her heart and say to herself, "You are far more suited to him than to the old man on whose arm you are leaning." And every time it happened she felt very sad.

Still sadder did she feel when someone, whose appearance she liked, took no notice of her. "I am not good enough for him," she would think. "He despises me. I wonder why he despises me?"

In fashionable resorts, such as the dining-room of the Brühlische Terrace, where there was a perpetual crossfire of covert glances, her attitude towards the outside world began gradually to alter. She would acknowledge the incense burnt at her shrine by an ever so slight grateful uplifting of her eyes. She returned without shyness the scrutiny of

ladies, and in spite of being blessed with sight as keen as a falcon's, she would dearly have loved to possess a lorgnette like theirs.

She was often tormented with a desire to look deep into eyes that rested on her without reserve, fear or restraint. It would have been a mystical union of souls, which would have done her infinite good ; for she could not disguise the fact from herself any longer—she was hungering for something, hungering as she had never hungered in her life before.

The colonel appeared perfectly oblivious of what was passing within her. But he waged bitter warfare with all who laid siege to her with their glances. The old Uhlan was incessantly on the watch, and was ready to stab on the instant with his eye's deadly darts the too persistent and ardent adorers. But there were some who were not in the least discomposed by his threatening demeanour, and who even had the audacity to return the compliment and look daggers at him. This made him uneasy, and he would fidget with his card-case, look as if he were going to write something, then put the pencil away ; and generally he ended by saying, " We seem in undesirable company here. Come, let us go ! " Yet, despite these uncomfortable experiences out of doors, he found it less and less possible to live at home completely *à deux* with his young wife. From his youth upwards he had been accustomed to gay society, and he liked noise, laughter, and light around him. Nevertheless, his suspicions grew and centred on Lilly.

One day he put a stop to her early church-going, in which she found her greatest solace. The impulse she had followed on the first morning that she awakened by his side had become by degrees a habit. While he slept on in profound slumber, she softly rose and dressed herself and glided out in the freshness of the dawn. It is true that her church-going consisted often of merely dipping her fingers in the holy water and curtsying three times. Now and then she contented herself by passing the church door with an untroubled conscience and not going in at all.

This was her hour of freedom, precious to her as gold, the only one that she had entirely to herself in the course of the whole day. She hurried first to the Augustus Bridge, offered her face to the breezes that blew there from every point of the compass, and watched the water rolling under her

feet. Next she flew along the bank, like a whirlwind, for she wanted to take in as many fresh impressions and pictures as she could, before creeping back into the connubial yoke. Everything that happened in this blessed hour was fraught with significance.

It was all experience, all happiness—the rosy early morning mist hanging over the hills and descending in golden shafts on to the river; the jangle of bells from the Altstadt; the first coy bursting of the buds on the russet boughs; the big waggons rumbling to market; the hissing of the swaying electric wires overhead when a tramcar passed. On these excursions she might even indulge in shop-gazing, as there was no fear of Nemesis in the shape of a present. How greedily she gloated over pictures and *objets d'art*!

And now all this was to end. It was over. The gates through which she escape,<sup>1</sup> for one single hour from the perfumed idleness and hothouse closeness of her gilded prison clanged behind her. But so pliable and yielding was her nature that not once in the secret depths of her heart did she complain. He wished it, and that was enough. Such powers of love lay idle within her, crying out for employment, that at this period of inward struggle she was obliged, whether she liked it or not, to give him a double share of tenderness, even whether her thoughts were with him or cantering off on a secret path of dreams.

She was his slave, his plaything, his attentive audience. She valeted him, praised his personal beauty, massaged his thighs with salves, arranged the hare-skin on his loins to charm away his gout, gave him his carbonate of soda to correct indiscretions in diet, dressed his grizzled locks with a hairwash, the pungent odour of which turned her sick, and looked on, giving him the benefit of her artistic taste and advice, while he tinted his moustache. And she did it all with eager zeal and naïve self-reliance, as if in tending and coaxing him she had found the very aim and end of her existence.

In the process, however, he became divested for her of every rag of his godlike attributes, so that nothing was left but a once soldierly, though now vain, and capricious man—mentally effete, for all his vaunted intellect; brutal, for all his refined tastes, with his appetites prematurely sated and enervated.

Not that she was really clear in her mind with regard to these defects of his qualities. If she had been, it is possible that she might have loathed and despised him. She was too young and ignorant of the world to know that life is like a witch's cauldron, which brews out of the souls of all men much the same mess, when ideals bleach with their hair and they have no altar on which to gain salvation through sacrifice.

The pictures her imagination painted of him faded and shifted from day to day, first in one direction, then in another, until something like pity mingled with her childlike respectful awe of him, and a certain motherliness that would have been unnatural, had it not had its foundations in the goodness of heart that found in the weaknesses of others an object for its fostering care.

Ah! if only she did not long for so much. Every day she sat at a sumptuously spread table and longed for more!

She read eagerly every morning the notices posted up in the vestibule of the hotel, giving a list of the evening's amusements. But the colonel would hurry her on—in the narrow groove of his small garrison he and the arts had become estranged. The organs necessary for the enjoyment of such things from long disuse had become decayed, and he shrank from the mental exertion required to galvanise them into activity once more.

The music-hall variety performances, boxing matches, ballets, and garish living-pictures, in which he took pleasure, were abhorrent to Lilly after she had once witnessed them out of curiosity. He declared that wild horses should not drag him again to Shakespeare or Wagner, nor to the concert-room, where Lilly longed to go.

One day Beethoven's *Symphony in C Minor* was among the announcements—the great work which was associated by a thousand tender ties with her childhood. She said nothing at the time, but afterwards she threw herself on her bed and cried bitterly. When he asked the cause of her grief she told him, and with a laugh he consented to be bored for once, and took her to the concert.

She had not been into a concert-room since her father's last pianoforte recital. She trembled as they took their places, fought back her tears and drew in the atmosphere in deep-drawn draughts.

"You are snorting like a horse when he smells oats," the colonel said jocularly.

"Haven't you noticed that it always smells the same in concert-rooms?" she asked in joyous excitement. "It was just like this in ours at home."

He couldn't remember what the concert-hall atmosphere was like, nor could he remember anything about the Symphony in C Minor.

"It's all rot," he said.

The part of the programme that preceded the Symphony was of no interest to her. She only wanted to listen to the trumpet-blast of fate—the call that she had heard first as she stood on the threshold of womanhood, and had been shaken to the foundations of her soul by a feeling of presentiment. And it came—came and thundered at every heart, and set trembling the knees of all those who were bound up together as fellow-combatants in the struggle against the mighty strokes of fate, and set them writhing as impotently as worms under the spell of a great power and a common fear.

Her husband hummed to himself, half-amused, "Ti-ti-ti-tum." That was all it meant to him: "Ti-ti-ti-tum."

As she turned to rebuke him softly into being quiet, she observed a tuft of yellowish-grey hair sprouting out of the cavity of his ear. She had never noticed it before, and it revolted her.

"What can you expect, when he has hair growing out of his ears?" she thought, as if this physical defect accounted for his lack of an ear for music. A profound feeling of dejection came over her. Never again would she be able to rejoice in the beautiful; never again stretch out her arms in worship of great heroic deeds; never again slack her thirst for higher and purer things at the fountains of inspiration.

The man who hummed "Ti-ti-ti-tum" and had hair growing out of his ears would be a barrier for evermore between her and all lofty living. The soothing sound of the violins did not console, the melancholy self-surrender of the Andante awoke no responsive echoes within her, the victorious jubilation of the Finale brought her no victory.

She left the hall with her yawning husband, humiliated, miserable, and disgusted with herself. But her joy in life was of too robust a growth, her faith in the sunny side of human nature too unwavering, for such moods of depression

to be of long duration. Soon after the concert something happened, which gave her hopes new wings and raised her again to giddy heights.

Without having made any definite plans, it had seemed to be an understood thing that they were to stay in Dresden, or some other large town, till May, when they would proceed to Lischnitz, where, in the absence of the master of the castle, the often talked of Fräulein von Schwertfeger held the reins of management. One evening, however, the colonel, who was eternally vacillating between confidence in and distrust of his girl-wife, was seized with a panic of doubt, and in order to lay bare the innermost secrets of her soul he began to cross-examine her on her previous love affairs.

Lilly, as usual, unsuspecting, related glibly first the story of Fritz Redlich, because he was the more important love, and, secondly, that of the poor consumptive assistant master.

Her husband, in spite of his jealous misgivings, had retained his clearness of judgment sufficiently to appreciate the guilelessness of Lilly's conscience, and he now threw his suspicions to the wind with a laugh that he generally reserved for his broadest jokes.

Lilly, having begun, was anxious to play further on her husband's emotions, so she went on to describe the wonderful lectures on the history of art, and how the poor invalid lecturer had infected her with his own burning yearnings to see Italy.

Her cheeks flamed, her eyes swam under her heavily drooping lids, as she went on giving voice to her dreams and drawing word-pictures, almost forgetful that she had a listener.

Suddenly he asked, "Shall we go there?"

She couldn't answer. The very proposal seemed too much bliss. Then he began to think it over seriously. A man might just as well get into the train and be landed at Milan or Verona as mope in one place and be worried to death by stupid fools dogging your footsteps. Lilly flung her arms round his neck, then threw herself at his feet. This was indeed too much happiness.

Her life now became an alternate dream of ecstasy and a fever of anxiety, for something might always happen to prevent their going. First, they had to wait for the knickerbocker suit, which he ordered at a tailor's as the correct

get-up for travelling, and then there were a dozen other delays. The truth may have been that he was pondering whether he could command enough youthful agility to keep pace with her excessive *élan* and capacity for enjoyment.

Then a certain incident hurried on their departure. For several days they had been shadowed by a fair-haired, bull-necked young man, six feet in height, who with stubborn pertinacity tried to attract Lilly's attention. Judging by his appearance he was probably an Anglo-Saxon tourist. There was in his manner a lofty nonchalance which rendered him absolutely indifferent to the threatening darts of the colonel's eyes.

For the first time Lilly saw her husband plunged in deep thought. He paced the room, muttering to himself repeatedly, "I shall have to box his ears"; or, "I must find a second."

The next day, when this irrepressible person followed them at a few yards' distance across the Schlossplatz, the colonel wheeled round and confronted him.

The fair giant measured him from top to toe without removing his short pipe from between his lips.

"I may look at anyone I choose to," he said in broken German, "and I may go anywhere I choose to."

He made a gesture as if he meant to turn up his coat-sleeves and struck an extremely pugilistic attitude, which discouraged all idea of inflicting on him a chivalrous correction.

The colonel, with a final attempt to bring the matter to an honourable issue, handed him his visiting-card, which the stranger put in his pocket with a friendly "Thank you, sir," without evidently the least notion of what this formality portended. A little crowd began to collect, and there was nothing left for the colonel but to turn his back on him.

The result of this passage of arms was, that in future the Englishman considered it his right to bestow on Lilly and her husband a greeting when they met. And the colonel, who tried unsuccessfully to stifle his consciousness of having made himself ridiculous in a torrent of oaths, resolved to leave Dresden on the spot.

In Munich, where they stopped a few days, it being the middle of April, to pay their respects at the Hofbräuhaus, nothing happened of a ruffling nature. But the colonel had become nervous. He cast furious and intimidating glances at the most harmless admirers, and began to heap reproaches

on Lilly's head. It seemed as if everyone at a first glance, he said, could divine she was not a lady, otherwise she would not attract so much vulgar notice. At another time Lilly would have been bitterly grieved, but now she was unmoved. She only smiled absently, for her spirit was far away, and already she fancied that she breathed the air of the promised land, on whose threshold she believed she was standing. One night more in the train, a short day in Bozen, and then the magic gates would swing back. Nothing now could prevent the fulfilment of bliss.

They were in a compartment of the express, which leaves Munich late in the evening and crosses the Brenner Pass in the gloom of early morning. Lilly and her husband sat in the corner seats by the windows. Not far from them, on the corridor side, a young man had taken his place with a pleasant smile, and then, without heeding his fellow-travellers, had soon become deep in a book that appeared to be written in Italian. Probably he was Italian too, an ambassador from that earthly paradise come to bid her welcome. Her interest in him was thus instantly arrested. From under her lowered lids, apparently asleep, she studied him. His severely cut even features were of a peculiar milky ivory colour. There was not a line or wrinkle in his clear skin, which looked as smooth as enamel. A small, dark, slightly curled moustache adorned his upper lip. The crisp hair on his temples was so closely cropped that the skin underneath gleamed through. She wanted to see what his eyes were like, but these were kept obstinately bent on his book, though he seemed to be only skimming the pages.

What excited her admiring wonder about him most was the finished grace of his movements. It was almost as if a young woman were disguised in that black and white check suit, which charmed her eye with its *distingué* cut. His throat disclosed a peep of a violet and dark-red striped silk shirt, under the soft collar of which a green tie was carelessly knotted.

All this was not in the least bizarre in effect, but harmonised perfectly. The costume apparently had been chosen with care and taste, and, together with his total disregard of herself, it exercised a fascination on Lilly. She could almost believe that this young stranger, by his dress, bearing,



and especially by his disregard of her presence, was compelling her notice.

Absurd as it was, she felt quite nervous. When they reached the Austrian frontier and the custom-house officials entered the carriage, he said a few foreign words in a low tone, which the officials evidently understood, for they turned away from him with low bows.

At the same moment he raised his eyes and let them wander round the carriage, and while the colonel was opening his bag, they rested for a second on her. What curious eyes they were! A dark, diamond-like radiance shot from them, yet they caressed, yes, caressed with a wicked confident tenderness, full of impatient questions—questions that made you blush.

The next minute it was as if nothing had happened. He bent over his book as before, and appeared not to have seen her.

Her husband gave her a look of watchful cunning as if he had discovered something in her face for which he had long been searching. Then, when the train went on again, he settled himself to sleep. For greater comfort he moved to the unoccupied seat next to the corridor. The stranger, wishing to avoid being opposite him, involuntarily shifted his position more towards the middle, so that the distance between himself and Lilly was appreciably diminished. A little more, and he would have been sitting directly opposite her.

Had Lilly been on her guard she would have paid more attention to her husband's sleep. But all her senses were centred on a desire to elude the stranger, whose proximity pricked her with a thousand needles.

She drew far back into her corner and looked intermittently out of the window, on the dark background of which the interior of the carriage was reflected as in a mirror. In this way she could contemplate him in peace, untroubled by a fear of his looking up and catching her. The light from the lamp in the ceiling sharply illumined his smooth, soft cheeks, with their polished surface merging into blue shadows on the temples. Such cheeks were surely made to be stroked and pressed against yours; to pass your hand over them would be a joy. And how long his eyelashes were—longer than her own—their shadow cast dark semi-circles as far down as his finely chiselled nostrils.

Suddenly he raised his eyes again and looked at her. There it was again, that dark caressing glance—cold, and yet how seductive!

She shrank back frightened, and was more frightened still at the thought that he might have seen her shrinking away from him.

He gave a scarcely perceptible smile, and went on again with his book; and still she continued to weave anxious and flattering thoughts around him—thoughts that were criminal in themselves, which descended on her like an avalanche that she hadn't the power to ward off. And then, all at once, with an icy chill at her heart, she felt a soft, tender pressure on her left foot, which she must by accident have thrust towards the centre of the gangway, for a moment before it had been resting on her right foot, which was still pressed close to the door of the compartment.

What was to be done? An indignant "I beg your pardon," an angry rising from her seat, would have awakened the colonel, and given cause for fresh suspicion and perhaps a duel. So she slowly, with extreme caution, withdrew her foot from under his and pressed it against the cushions, to be quite sure that she had rescued it. But she felt that the moment of hesitation had made her a participator in the crime, and this conviction oppressed and weighed on her more than her train of sinful thoughts had a few minutes before tormented her.

In her own eyes she appeared dishonoured, polluted, a prey to any and every licentious man who crossed her path. But why blame him? Was not his impertinently expressed desire merely the fulfilment of her own impure wishes? The reflection half suffocated her. She wanted to spring up, cry aloud, and ask to be forgiven. The stranger, however, went on reading calmly, as if nothing at all had occurred.

There was a glimmer of grey dawn when Lilly started up out of a half-waking doze. She saw a waterfall tossing its white foam beneath her; beyond towered huge moss-crowned rocks against the sky. It was a picture she had dreamed of, but never seen, appealing and impressive in its rugged grandeur and massive strength. All that had passed before she fell asleep seemed now a grotesque phantasmagoria devoid of reality. She glanced round the carriage nervously, and saw the stranger stretched out at full length, repulsive in

sleep, his cheeks inflated and puffy as his breath came and went in heavy gasps. He looked to her now pasty and effeminate, and she loathed him.

She turned away in disgust and caught her husband's eyes wide open, fixed on her in severe reproof. She started guiltily.

"Can't you sleep any longer?" she asked, with a forced smile.

"I have not slept at all," he answered.

There was something in his voice that set her trembling anew. It accused and condemned at the same time. And how angrily he looked at her!

The journey was continued in silence, and she paid no further heed to the stranger.

After taking rooms at Bozen, the colonel came to Lilly and said: "Look here, my dear girl, this can't go on. I am tired of the unpleasantness to which I am subjected day after day. How far your appearance and behaviour or my age are accountable, I cannot say. We will not discuss the point. I have no charge of glaring misconduct and bad taste to bring against you. One does not expect the manners of a *grande dame* from anyone who a few months ago was serving behind a counter. It requires time to instruct you in such, and I can with confidence hand over your further education to our excellent *Fräulein von Schwertfeger*. So, if you please, we will change our plans and return to Germany by the midday train. On the evening of the day after to-morrow, perhaps earlier, we shall reach my estate."

Lily was too crushed and miserable to make any objection.

And the land of promise, the goal of her dreams, sank beneath the waves.

## CHAPTER XV

THEY arrived at Lischnitz in the small hours of Sunday morning. The colonel had forbidden any ceremonious reception, so that there was nothing to be seen in the faint moonlight as they drove up but the dark mass of shadows cast by the castle and its outbuildings. A couple of maid-servants stood on the steps with lanterns in their hands, and a tall lady, with a too slight figure, a wasp-like waist and a flaming aureole of red-gold hair sprinkled with grey, threw two thin arms round Lilly's neck, and in a plaintive, discordant voice spoke motherly words of welcome, which instead of warming Lilly's heart filled it with shyness and dread.

Worn out, Lilly sank on to a billowy white bed, on the gilded posts of which pale-blue satin bows were perched like strange and wonderful butterflies. On the wings of these butterflies Lilly was carried out of a restless sleep into the new day of a new life.

A gold lamp, with opalescent glass and pale-blue silk shade, hung from the ceiling. The walls were wainscoted with white enamelled woodwork, and between were panels of brocade in the same shade of pale blue as the counterpane, hangings, and lamp-shade. Through the heavy curtains a ray of sunlight revealed all this on its way over the old-gold Persian carpet, patterned with pale-blue wreaths.

Lilly, with an ecstatic exclamation, jumped out of bed and tripped about on the soft carpet, the pile rising like waves of velvet over her feet.

Nothing was to be seen or heard of the colonel. He had told her long ago that they would have separate rooms, but his must be somewhere near, perhaps on the other side of that glossy white carved door.

She opened it cautiously and peeped in. The window

curtains were hardly drawn back, the monster dark mahogany bed, with its tumbled pillows, was empty. There were prints of race-horses on the walls, hunting-crops, pistols, and military accoutrements. On the round table by the sofa was a pipe-rack and tobacco-jar, and close to the bed lay the familiar tube of gout ointment. Last night, then, he must have massaged himself, and had thus deprived her of her sacred duty. In the midst of her wounded feelings a shiver ran through her. Everything here was so strangely hard and relentless ; threats seemed to be lurking in the corners. Hastily she shut the door again and withdrew into her pale blue kingdom.

The room boasted two more doors ; one led into the corridor, for through it Fräulein von Schwertfeger had brought her the night before. And once more she shivered. Without any preliminaries, as a matter of course, the thin melancholy person with lustreless eyes and imperious manner had yesterday taken possession of her. She and the colonel had exchanged a glance—a brief glance of understanding which meant, " I hand her over to you," on one side, " And I am ready to do my best," on the other ; she was therefore at the spinster's mercy. Certainly she had made an attempt to cajole Lilly by petting and addressing her by endearing names, and bringing tea with her own hands to her bedside ; yet the girl, who was ordinarily so frankly responsive and trustful of everyone, whether man or woman, felt conscious of an inward voice where this woman was concerned calling aloud, " Beware ! "

Now, as she gazed at the door which the claw-like fingers had thrown open for her, and recalled some of the chilling incidents of her arrival, a great loneliness and despondency oppressed her heart in spite of her newly acquired splendour.

With impetuous hands she flung on the morning wrapper, which Fräulein von Schwertfeger must have unpacked, for it was hanging beside the bed. The third door remained to be explored, and Lilly hoped that it would lead her into the open air. She raised the latch softly, inquisitively, and with a little cry recoiled. Her eyes were dazzled at what she saw.

A small room, flooded with sunshine and filled with flowers, laughed at her like a garden from paradise. Azaleas, as tall as a man, spread their coronets of pink blossoms over a lounge piled with cushions ; a sweet little escritoire stood near it, inlaid with tortoise-shell and mother-of-pearl, and above waved the fronds of a feathery palm. But that was

not the most beautiful thing ; the most beautiful and surprising thing of all was the toilette-table. Veiled in white lace, it greeted her modestly from a corner. The top was a sheet of thick crystal glass polished at the edges, and on it stood a tall three-sided swing-mirror, in which you could see every part of yourself at once—your back hair, profile, dress fastening and all. Long had she wished for a mirror like this, but would never have dared to ask for it.

This enchanting little room was, of course, the boudoir. Lilly Czepanek with a boudoir ! Was such a miracle to be believed ? An array of articles was laid out on the glass top of the dressing-table. You could not take them all in at a first glance, however wide you opened your eyes : ivory-backed hairbrushes, a set of four, hard and soft, a hand-glass with a daintily carved handle, a powder-puff in a round ivory box, a glove-buttoner and shoe-horn—all silver and ivory. And more, still more ! Whoever saw such things ? Only by degrees could you learn for what mysteries of the toilette they were designed, and on every single one flaunted in glistening gold the monogram " L. M." under the coronet with seven points.

It was enough to drive you crazy with delight ! Having gloried in everything to her heart's content, she proceeded on her triumphal march through her new territory. The room she was in had only one window, or rather a glass door. This opened on to a balcony, where a rocking-chair was placed, and where over a high iron trellis-work young creepers rambled. Later in the year, when the leaves were fully out, you would be quite shut in by high green walls ; but now, in early spring, you could easily be seen through the spaces in the leaves from below.

She slipped cautiously out through the glass door into the open air. The stables and barns were seen on her left above the kitchen-garden wall, forming a quadrangle round the yard ; to the right were gigantic trees, their trunks green with moss, their tangle of boughs only thinly covered as yet with tender young leaves and buds. In them the birds were making a vociferous riot, almost deafening to hear. Straight opposite, at a few yards' distance, a gabled roof rose among the trees, belonging to an ancient one-storeyed shooting lodge that abutted on the park, and apparently had its entrance in the yard. Here at last some human creatures were visible. Two gentlemen, one with a short grey beard, the other middle-

aged, stout, and as brown as a berry, walked up and down together smoking, and deep in conversation. And a third—

Why! what did this mean? That slim, muscular youth with the high collar and light yellow gaiters, sitting on the outside of one of the windows at the gable end, while he coaxed a red puppy on a leash to climb his knee—who was he? No other than Walter von Prell! Yes, there could be no doubt about it! It was her lively comrade, the dear little ex-lieutenant who boasted that he was unblest with any sort of moral sense, the only man in all the world who had kissed her lips . . . except the colonel, who didn't count.

Yes, she recognised the light eyelashes, and the jingling gold bangle and the light almost inaudible laugh, which every time the red dog with pricked ears fell off his knee convulsed him like an earthquake. The one thing different about him was that his hair, close cropped of old, like yellow velvet, was now rather long and straggling.

Lilly stretched out her arms toward him playfully, with a light-hearted laugh.

"Herr von Prell! Herr von Prell!" she would have liked to call out, but fortunately stopped herself in time.

Well, at any rate, she was no longer quite alone in this strange world. Her merry comrade was here to be her knight and playmate; she owed all her good fortune to him.

Then it came back to her how he had said that the old colonel was "dead nuts" on him, and wanted him to come and play "Fritz Triddelfitz"—she knew her "Stromtid"—on his estate.

Only, it was funny that the colonel had in all these weeks never mentioned that he was there. He did not talk much about his home, however, and Fräulein von Schwertfeger was alone alluded to when his young wife needed a reprimand.

Did he suspect that it was no other than Prell who had discovered her and brought her into the light of day? Anyhow, she would certainly not let the morning pass without telling the colonel and Fräulein von Schwertfeger that they were old acquaintances. It would not be necessary to say anything about the kiss. After all, it had meant nothing more than a kiss in a game of kiss-in-the-ring.

No sooner had she got back to her bedroom and pulled back the curtains than someone knocked at the door, three short, impatient taps which seemed to freeze the marrow in

her bones. It was Fräulein von Schwertfeger, of course. Who else could make her tremble so with fright? Her forehead was kissed, her cheeks stroked with every sign of approval and liking. But the glance of the great colourless eyes measured her from head to foot; a sour suppressed smile hovered about the hard-cut mouth, round which the skin was red and baggy, as is often the case when women with once good complexions age prematurely.

Over her arm was thrown a pile of clothes, which Lilly recognised as her own.

"I have brought you what you will require, my dear child," she said, "so that you may dress properly for the morning. In the country it is not customary to fly about the house in a morning wrapper. Meanwhile, after breakfast, we are to make a little tour of the estate, so that you can become acquainted with the people and see how the household works."

"Shall I do the housekeeping?" asked Lilly, shyly.

"If you understand how," said Fräulein Schwertfeger, and bit her lips while her half-closed eyes squinted askance.

Lilly dimly apprehended that her harmless question had been taken as a suggestion of infringing rights. So to make amends for her want of tact she added haltingly, "At least, I should like to do it if I——" She was going to add, "am allowed," but Fräulein Schwertfeger interrupted.

"My dear," she said, drawing herself up, "you have come here as mistress, and I am perfectly aware of the fact. But, if I may venture to advise, I should make no demands in your place to begin with; you will have enough to do in attending to your own behaviour. On this will depend your ever becoming in reality what you are now in name only."

Lilly felt too snubbed and depressed to answer.

The duenna was showing her hand already.

"I should advise you further," she went on, "to feel very carefully the ground on which you will afterwards have to move. For this you will need a guide who is more familiar with it than yourself. Otherwise you may be landed in difficulties from which you can never be rescued, and that, considering your relations to the colonel, would be a great pity."

Tears began to rise in Lilly's eyes. The old feeling of impotence, which she considered her greatest fault, overcame her.



"Oh, please, don't *you* be my enemy," she implored, clasping her hands.

There was a sudden ray of light in Fräulein von Schwertfeger's eyes, which lay usually like extinct volcanoes beneath their heavy lids, and whether it meant inquiry, astonishment, or compassion was not quite clear. For a moment she continued to stare before her into space, and Lilly beheld a grand noble profile that looked as if it had been chiselled out of marble and seemed to belong to someone quite different.

Then she found herself being encircled by two long thin arms, and held in an embrace warmer and sincerer than any of the endearments Fräulein von Schwertfeger had previously lavished on her.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed, "you really are a dear child," and she departed.

Half an hour later Lilly, attired in the clothes Fräulein von Schwertfeger had chosen for her, entered the dining-room, where old Ferdinand, a withered, spindle-legged specimen of the ancient retainer, was laying the breakfast. The impudent footman with the significant smile was not there, Lilly was thankful to see.

The colonel came in from his early morning ride. His eyes sparkled with the landlord's pride in his property. His thin cheeks glowed and dewdrops hung on the grey bristles on his temples. His tweed jacket became him, and his bow-legs were hidden beneath the table. Altogether he looked a fine old Nimrod, both wicked and pleasing. Lilly flew into his arms, and with a glance round he asked:

"Well? How do you like your home?"

Lilly kissed his hand for calling it *her* home.

The dining-room was long and lofty, vaulted at each end, and filled with dark carved-oak furniture. In spite of three bay windows opening on the terrace the room was dimly lighted. From the terrace, railed flights of steps led down into the park, where the sunbeams, playing on the young foliage, made a lacework of green.

At breakfast they discussed the circular route which was to be taken to show the young mistress her new domain. The colonel had no idea of presenting her formally to the tenants. She was to take them as she found them in their Sunday best, and they might gaze their fill at her as she passed.

The head men on the estate, who from time immemorial

had dined at the castle on Sundays, would pay their respects to her later at dinner.

"The latest addition to them was once one of my officers, a Herr von Prell," the colonel remarked, giving Lilly a reflective look. "He left the army before I did, and has come here to learn farming," he added quickly.

Here was Lilly's golden opportunity of telling her husband that she knew him, but the confession died in her throat. She couldn't tell him; it wouldn't do. She would at once involve herself in a mesh of suspicions.

The great pale eyes of Fräulein von Schwertfeger were already fixed on her face full of searching scrutiny.

Anyhow, one thing was clear, the colonel knew nothing. He had not mentioned the young reprobate's presence on the estate before, evidently because he didn't think him worth it.

"How is he behaving?" he asked, turning to Fräulein von Schwertfeger.

"Good gracious, colonel, don't ask me!" she exclaimed, regarding the nails of her long thin fingers, which shone like mother-of-pearl. "You know I never find fault till I am obliged."

"Damned young scoundrel!" the colonel laughed, and Lilly, who involuntarily took her comrade's part, felt that was fault-finding enough.

After breakfast the tour began. Lilly walked between the colonel and Fräulein von Schwertfeger. They were joined by a pack of dogs, with whom she was instantly on friendly terms. First they went to the kitchen. It was a simply wonderful kitchen. It had walls of Dutch tiles, copper taps out of which streams of hot and cold water gushed, and a hearth of solid porcelain. Everything was so astonishing you hardly knew what to look at first. And there was a face, an old rugged, weather-beaten, thick-lipped face that looked up with moist eyes, dumbly inquiring, "Don't you remember me, then?" And Lilly's eyes answered, "Yes, I remember you." But she dared not speak with her lips as well as her eyes, in case Fräulein von Schwertfeger should be started on investigations of the most crucial hour of her life, and have a greater contempt for her than she had already. So she gave the old cook her hand in silence, which renewed their bond of friendship. Next they went to the farm-servants' kitchen, where the Sunday soup was boiling and bubbling in

a huge copper cauldron like a stormy sea. Then to the laundry, where the wringers and mangles shone like plated dreadnoughts and the fragrance of soap lingered pleasantly in every corner and cranny. The dairy and storerooms came next. Great hams hung from the rafters like giant bats, wrapped in grey muslin; sausages, too, like brown polished bolsters; and on straw there lay, even now in April, piles of winter apples, golden pippins, and other rare kinds. Rows of wide-lipped jars stood on the store-closet shelves. They contained the preserves and dried fruits, to which one might help oneself. Now the trio crossed the paved yard, where the waggons and threshing-machines stood in line like soldiers on parade, to the barns and stables. The saddle-horse stable! Heavens! what a palace! Wicker chairs with cushions and footstools in front of them were scattered about inviting you to rest. Over the stalls ran a matting frieze, with porcelain plates on which the names of the thoroughbreds who dwelt inside were engraved. Glossy slender necks and silken manes were thrust forth to greet the beautiful young mistress, and intelligent human eyes looked at her beseechingly.

"You must choose one of these to ride," said the colonel.

"But I can't ride," replied Lilly, embarrassed.

The grooms in red coats, who stood about with their caps in their hands, grinned incredulously. A "gracious" lady who couldn't ride had never come their way before.

Then they visited the stalls of the cart-horses. These were less interesting. Some of them were dirty and not sweet-smelling. As for the cowsheds, they made you feel nearly ill. But she took care not to show what she felt, and, eager to learn, listened attentively to all the colonel's and Fräulein von Schwertfeger's explanations.

The severest ordeal was yet to come--the progress through the labourers' quarters. The people had just come home from church, and stood in little expectant groups before their doors. The worthiest and most venerable were the first to be introduced. There were many names difficult to master, dirty hands and faces that stared at her awed, but with a subdued "Who are you?" expression.

Lilly, nevertheless, acquitted herself of her task as if born to it. She had little kind speeches ready that went straight to the hearts of the sick and aged, and when she fell on her

knees to draw a toddling baby into her arms and kiss it, a murmur of approval cheered her on her way. At the further end of the settlement were two or three barnlike buildings that seemed to have been made into dwelling-houses as an afterthought. They had irregular windows with casements painted red and blue, and the single doorway had been partially bricked up. Here the Polish immigrants were housed. They came originally as hirelings from distant provinces to help with the harvest, and had never returned.

The district in which the castle was situated had always, from ancient times, been Teuton, and staunchly Teuton it had remained through the Slav invasion. It was necessary, therefore, Fräulein von Schwertfeger said, to uphold the banner of Teutonism. She spoke in so warning a tone that Lilly felt ashamed, as if she had done something to pull it down.

Scarlet head-kerchiefs prevailed here, and great blue hunted-looking eyes gazed at her, imploring sympathy. Here and there an obeisance was made to the very hem of her skirts, a shy kiss was pressed on her sleeve. "Niech bedzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus" fell fluently on her ear, and she responded instinctively: "Na wieki wiekow! Amen." For she, the Catholic, knew from childhood that this was the correct answer to the Polish greeting.

There arose a joyous hum and glad whispering among the little herd as they huddled cringingly together. This fair young Pana had spoken to them in their own language and the language of their God.

"I never knew that you spoke Polish," remarked the colonel, with a jarring note of blame in his voice; and Lilly, laughing nervously, explained how she came by the phrase.

They did not linger long at the next building, where a group of youths in gray blouses stood awkwardly bowing and twirling their caps. She was scarcely given time to bestow on them a kindly smile and nod, and even this was evidently not approved. Though she said nothing, Fräulein von Schwertfeger's aristocratic nose held Teutonism aloft by sniffing in the air.

"Now, darling," she said, when they were on the castle steps again, "you will change into your dark-blue cloth gown. I have had it unpacked and pressed out, and you will find it in your dressing-room with a lace collar. It is the fitting costume for Sunday dinner."

Lilly arrayed herself obediently in the dark-blue cloth, in which she looked extra slight, and her heart beat in trepidation at the thought of meeting her merry friend, who could not be supposed to know that she had disowned him, and who might betray both of them at the outset by some careless allusion to their former friendship.

The dinner-gong sounded through the house, and the next minute came those three quick, incisive taps on the door.

She started back from the mirror, for on no account must Fräulein von Schwertfeger guess she was vain. The latter regarded her silently for a moment from head to toe, then, seizing both her hands while her pale-blue eyes burned into her, she said, "God grant that you don't work too much mischief in this world, my child."

"Why should I do mischief?" stammered Lilly, once more humiliated. "I have never done anyone any harm."

Fräulein von Schwertfeger smiled. "The one good thing about you is that you are ignorant of what you are," she said, and drew her by the arm out into the corridor and down the creaking old staircase to the dining-room.

There, with the colonel, drawn up in line, stood four dark manly figures ready to greet her. He of the pointed grey beard was introduced as "Herr Leichtweg, our head steward." He of the stout form and sunburnt coppery skin as "Herr Messner, our book-keeper"; and then another, and then — "Lieutenant von Prell, agricultural pupil," said the colonel.

A slight inclination of her head to him as to the others. She dared not let it be more.

"But, oh!" she thought, "my poor merry comrade, what have you done to yourself?"

A long frock-coat fell to his knees, his small pointed head was lost in the high collar. All was correct to a fold. His expression, gestures, bearing, everything about him was marked by obsequious formality and rigid propriety.

Lost in pitying amazement, she contemplated him. Had she not seen him that very morning so different!

"You should shake hands with them," the Schwertfeger voice prompted behind her.

She collected herself, and returned the pressure of the two honest countrymen's sun-tanned palms with more warmth,

perhaps, than became a stately young chatelaine ; but from Prell's freckled but still carefully kept hand she withdrew hers quickly.

"What a blessing ! I needn't be afraid of his giving me away," she reflected.

Then came grace.

## CHAPTER XVI

**T**HE finches were the worst behaved, though the tom-tits and the nuthatches ran them very close in the noise they made. As for the blackbirds and thrushes, they seemed to think the place belonged to them ; much more so than the starlings, who kept to themselves, and apparently cared for nothing in earth or heaven. The wrens and hedge-robins contributed their fair share to the chorus, but nothing could beat the fanfare of the finches, which was almost more than ears only accustomed hitherto to the tiny song of a caged cock-canary could endure.

The aged Haberland in his felt slippers knew them all apart. The old gardener's office had become a sinecure, as he was too infirm now to do anything more than sprinkle the lawn with the hose. Old Haberland knew exactly which birds built their nests in the trees and which on the ground, at what hour they began to sing, and the best post of observation to take up if you wanted to study their habits and plumage.

It was horrible that the squirrels must be shot. She could almost have hated the old fellow when she saw him going out with his rifle under his coat to wage war against those jolly little beasts. For he declared that the artful little robbers knew the gun when they saw it, and scurried off and outwitted him if they caught sight of it. He wasn't on friendly terms either with the jays and magpies. His favourite was the shy green woodpecker, which he had coaxed to nest in the park. Then there was that curiosity, the parti-coloured hoopoe, so tame that it came fearlessly at all hours of the day close up to the castle, sang its " Hu-tu-tu," and then with his crooked sabre of a bill cut the worms out of the grass.

Since the world began there could not have been such radiant glorious mornings as these. When you put your head

out of doors at five o'clock, the cool purple mist wrapped you about like a royal mantle. Over the pond, where the reeds and rushes seemed to grow up in a night, forced by invisible hands, lay sunlit vapours which lifted gradually and rose into the sky in luminous columns. Vapour arose everywhere. Often it looked as if white fires had been kindled on the slopes of the lawn; clouds of light rolled heavily from the glittering fronds as if satiated with the dew they had absorbed. Oh, what mornings!

Then, when things burst into flower, you never grew tired of wandering about, filling apron and basket with great sprays of snowy and purple lilac and trails of golden chain, till you were almost drowned in a sea of blossom. The mad joy of the dogs was indescribable, when their lovely young mistress appeared smiling on the garden steps in her white blouse and short skirt, armed with scissors and shears. Patiently they waited for her, whining and yelping if she came later than they expected; for they had given her without hesitation their canine allegiance, regardless of pitying, benevolent smiles from Fräulein von Schwertfeger, whom they abhorred.

The cleverest of them all, Bevel the terrier, was not numbered among her admiring bodyguard, as he never failed to attend at the colonel's heels when he took his early morning survey of his acres. But there was Pluto, the long-eared setter, who now in the spring was out of employment, and went on his own account hunting rabbits in the park. There were Schnauzl the poodle and Bobbi the dachshund, who lived in constant state of jealous feud with each other because of her. But most beautiful of all was Regina, the huge panther-like Dane, whose left foreleg had been injured by a stone, and who, ashamed of her lameness in the daytime, always slunk out of the sight of strangers, though at night she made up for it by keeping indefatigable guard and terrifying the neighbourhood by her bay.

Indescribable, too, were the gambols of the colts in the paddock beyond the rose garden, the craving for caresses of the two-year-olds, when their sugar-squandering mistress pulled back the hurdles and stretched out her arms, to pillow on them the slender heads of her young pets.

Nothing, too, could equal the fury of the turkey-cock when the pheasants stole a march on him and got the first crumbs; though he surpassed himself in jealous rage when those idiotic



ducks dared to squat on Lilly's feet as if it were a perfectly natural thing to do. So bristling with anger was he that he would sometimes peck at Pluto's drooping ears, an attention which the setter declined with a contemptuous shake of the head.

Oh ! those were mornings worth living !

After the early stroll round the estate came breakfast, at which she arrived so brimming over with happiness and affection that it didn't matter whether she threw her arms first round the colonel's neck or Anna's ; for now in confidential moments she was permitted to call her by her Christian name, and felt more drawn to her, though still full of fear of her displeasure and harsh judgment. For indeed she found in her a severe schoolmistress. No word, gesture, or movement of Lilly's escaped observation, or if necessary, reproof. There was a right and a wrong way of sitting at table, or in an arm-chair, pouring out tea, of asking someone to sit down, of beginning a conversation, and making visitors known to each other. Lilly learnt to glide over the difficulty of forgotten names and to show each one the proper degree of friendship. These and a hundred other little matters Lilly was enlightened upon. There seemed no end to them.

This was only practising in the small compass of the castle and on its occasional guests. The real thing was to come later, in the autumn, when Lilly was to call on the wives of the proprietors of the neighbouring estates. Till then the colonel desired to live quietly at home with as little outward social intercourse as possible. It was easy for him to find an excuse, as, after his many years of bachelorhood, it was not unnatural that he should wish to prolong his honeymoon. By the autumn Lilly's education would be complete, and she would emerge into society a *grande dame* capable of holding her own at the functions of the landed nobility and in the casino with a tact that would not disgrace her husband's name and rank ; and Fräulein von Schwertfeger kept this ideal, as the highest attainable, before Lilly's eyes every hour of the day. It was like preparing for an examination in the Selecta, Lilly thought, as she anxiously modelled herself after the prescribed pattern, and dreamed day and night of her *début*.

In reality, she was only at ease when wandering about out of doors or shut up in her boudoir. " Boudoir ! " No, she mustn't call it that. Fräulein von Schwertfeger said that it

was a sitting-room, and only very rich butchers' and bankers' wives—according to Fräulein von Schwertfeger they were the same—owned boudoirs.

Thus Lilly stumbled at every step. Sometimes, as if to put her social development to the test, the colonel permitted Lilly, under Fräulein von Schwertfeger's wing, to do the honours of his table when he chanced to entertain fellow-officers who turned up from neighbouring barracks. On these occasions the same thing always happened. At first she would be as stiff as a wound-up doll, incapable of making a spontaneous remark to the military guests in their resplendent uniforms ; but in a few glasses of wine she found courage and became by degrees more lively, not to say merry, till at last she simply bubbled over with innocent little jokes—how they came into her head she didn't know—and so charmed these men, who had mostly passed their prime, that they paid her court in every word they said, and kept their gaze fixed on her face in delight and desire. The colonel would become uneasy, and Fräulein von Schwertfeger, who generally stared at her plate with a scoffing little smile, received a sign from him ; whereupon the ladies instantly rose and retired, deaf to all the loudly expressed regrets at their going on the part of the men.

The ecstasy, however, that she had awakened in her husband's guests recoiled on herself : made her exultant and sorry together, and compelled her to sit till past midnight, with wet cheeks, beating heart, and strained nerves staring out into the blue twilight of the park.

Foreshadowings of undisciplined madness and uncontrolled self-abandon swept like lightning flashes through her brain. A consuming fever within her relaxed her limbs. It made the dress she wore, the room she was in, the park, the world seem too small for her, and filled her soul with a crowd of dancing fiery shapes, a whirl of reflected masculine passions.

On such nights as these the colonel would come to her, in a more or less intoxicated condition, when the guests were gone, and reproach her mildly for not being "ladylike" enough ; then, when she tried to defend herself, he would kiss her tears away and throw himself beside her on the bed. Shivering with disgust at his drunkenness, her conscience a prey to groundless pangs, yet for all that happy and relieved to feel

herself released from a torturing anxiety, she fell asleep in his arms.

There were other nights when she felt restless and lonely and would have been glad of his company, when she longed in soul as well as body to cling humbly to him ; but he did not come, and locked his door. On the whole, he treated her kindly. To him she was a light fragile toy, not to be played with too often in case of damage, but to be put away carefully after use till next time—and this suited her well enough. At least she personally was spared the terror of his outbursts of fury, which two or three times a day threatened to shiver the walls of the castle to atoms. Even Fräulein Von Schwertfeger hardly knew how to meet them, and bowed her head and bit her lips as to an inevitable fate when the storms burst.

Lilly could never quite make up her mind as to what were the relations between these two. Generally, it seemed as if, during long years, mutual sympathy and understanding had bound them together by indissoluble ties, though at other times they appeared to have nothing in common and to avoid each other, he with frigid hauteur, she with scorn in her squinting sidelong glances. It had often occurred to Lilly, too, that when Fräulein von Schwertfeger was young and fair to look upon, she and the colonel might have had a love affair. But gradually she abandoned this idea, for if anything of the kind had ever existed, Fräulein von Schwertfeger would have been far too proud to endure their present companionship, and he was too domineering to tolerate the presence of any such uncomfortable reminder of a dead amour. All Lilly could gather of the aristocratic spinster's past was that as the orphan of a poor officer she had been forced to earn her own living almost since her confirmation. She had presided over the colonel's house for nearly twenty years. That she, like herself, was without resources and dependent on the whims of the same old man seemed to Lilly to form a bond of sympathy between herself and Fräulein von Schwertfeger, yet she never could get rid of the undefinable dread she had been inspired with at the outset. She really was indebted to her for many things. Without the spinster's untiring surveillance she must have fallen innumerable times from the straight road, which was to lead to her apotheosis as noblewoman and Lady Bountiful. When she was disposed to err on the side of over-humility, there would have been scoffers to take base

advantage of it ; and her easy-going manner with those who were not her equals might, if uncorrected, have got her into serious trouble. 'As it was, she was popular with everyone. In the kitchens and the stables, the villages and the agents' offices, everywhere she was greeted respectfully with beaming smiles. But it was in the Polish quarters, where the women dried their washing behind great fires of brushwood, that she was simply idolised. It may have been that they had got wind of her Slavonic name and her Catholicism. Anyhow, by all those poor despised foreign folk, who drifted about among the proud stolid Germans, with humility in their downcast child-like eyes and snatches of their native song on their lips, Lilly was regarded in the light of a saviour and patron saint. She loved to visit and busy herself with these gentle grateful people. She tended the sick and took compassion on the forsaken. The girls were to her like her own sisters, who needed a watchful eye over them ; and as for the boys, they were a sacred trust whose welfare she would always have at heart.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger grimly disapproved of this attachment between Lilly and the Poles.

"The people on the estate are beginning to complain," she said, "that you prefer the aliens to themselves. If I were you I should take my walks in another direction."

Lilly objected to doing this, and so Fräulein von Schwertfeger bore her company when she went in the direction of the barn dwellings, in case they should exercise too great a fascination over her. She succeeded, too, in converting Lilly to Protestantism—only outwardly, of course.

"You may worship your Blessed Virgin and St Joseph as much as you like," she said, "but do remove those images and relics from your bedside. And then with regard to going to church, certainly if you like you can drive five miles in to Krammen to attend mass. The colonel will allow you, but, all the same, I would like you, my sweet, to come to church with us and sit in the ancestral pew ; do, to please me. You won't regret it."

And, when Lilly unresisting had given in, Fräulein von Schwertfeger presented her as a reward with a tiny folding domestic altar. The outside looked like a dainty jewel-box, but when you opened it—oh, joy !—there was the Holy Child in the arms of the Virgin painted on glass, with St. Anne on the left panel and St. Joseph on the right.

Lilly almost wept, she was so pleased with it. Still, she could not bring herself to love the giver as she ought. Often when they sat together chatting confidentially, Lilly felt solitary and—frightened. She even dared not satisfy her hunger. Since the days of Frau Asmussen's milk puddings, Lilly had developed an enormous, well-nigh indecent appetite, and Fräulein von Schwertfeger's aghast expression at her piled-up plate often was the cause of her rising from table still unsatisfied, and falling back on raids on the storeroom cupboard between meals. The dear old cook, her fast ally, guaranteed to guard Lilly from surprises on the part of Fräulein von Schwertfeger, and when she came into the kitchen Lilly accounted for her presence there on the plea that she was learning to cook, an announcement which was received with patronising merriment.

If it had not been for old Grete the cook, she would have known nothing at all about the conduct of the household, for, either from caution or greed of power, Fräulein von Schwertfeger chose to conceal everything that might have led to a practical and intelligent comprehension of the *ménage*. When she offered to help she was told help was not wanted, and she must take care of her hands and not tire herself. So it went on day after day.

She would have given anything to learn riding, but there again Schwertfeger interference prevented her by discovering signs of motherhood, which invariably proved later to be a false alarm. She might not so much as cultivate her musical talent. The old tin-kettle of a piano, the rattling yellow keys of which looked like a set of teeth decayed from tobacco smoke—just as the colonel's were—was not to be replaced by a new one till they went to Danzig for the day in the autumn.

So her life dragged on, half in bliss, half in regret. She felt like a pilgrim who against her will had strayed into paradise. She looked back on the time before her marriage as on a long, long vanished youth, and would have laughed at anyone who had pointed out to her that at barely nineteen most of her youth lay before her. It was well that opposite, in the bailiff's lodge, there was at least one person who could testify to her having been a girl once; otherwise she might have told herself that her girlhood was a dream, and she had been a full-fledged married woman and the colonel's wife before she was out of her cradle.

All this time she had only met her merry comrade at dinner on Sunday, when, in his long frock-coat, with his reverential awed manner, he cut a rather comical figure. Neither of them by a single word or glance recalled the past. Often from her balcony, now completely secluded by its growth of rambling vines, she looked across to the gabled house and saw him gambolling with the red little fox of a puppy. Then it seemed to her that this blond-haired good-for-nothing, who flirted with all the pretty girls on the estate, so old Grete said, was the only creature with whom she had anything in common in this cold world. Grete told how he nearly rode the horses to death to get back from his secret outings before dawn; and then sometimes behind the closed shutters of his den—— Here old Grete could not proceed, and Lilly concluded that things too dreadful for words went on behind those closed shutters.

## CHAPTER XVII

ONE hot August morning Lilly, with her arms full of dewy roses, herself besprinkled with dew from head to toe, entered the dining-room where Anna was making tea, looking lean and tall in her simple blue-grey linen gown. Her manner and greeting were the same as usual, yet Lilly divined instantly that something out of the ordinary had happened. She also noticed that Käte, the maid who helped old Ferdinand with the waiting, had red eyes, and was biting her lips till they bled almost as she laid the table. Käte was pretty and superior to the average servant-girl, also better educated, her father having been a schoolmaster. For this reason Fräulein von Schwertfeger had chosen her from among the other maids to help Lilly with her toilette.

When she had gone out of the room, Lilly began to ask questions.

Anna von Schwertfeger kissed her with redoubled tenderness and affection.

"My darling," she said, "why sully your pure mind with disagreeable matters? When people are bent on breaking their necks, what is the good of trying to prevent them?"

"If it's a question of breaking necks," thought Lilly, "Walter von Prell must have something to do with it."

Then she said aloud that she thought as mistress of the house she ought to know what was going on, especially as in future she intended to do the housekeeping herself.

The modesty of her "in future" impressed Fräulein von Schwertfeger favourably, and she yielded.

"I am sure it will give you pain," she said, "because I know you like him."

"Him!" echoed Lilly; and she was conscious that she blushed.

"Indeed, we all like him," she went on in an excusing tone; "the colonel is extremely fond of him. So long as he carried on his little games at a distance I kept my eyes shut and refused to listen to gossip; but when it comes to his breaking into the castle, it's a little too much, and time to stop it."

"What has he done, then?" Lilly asked, shocked.

"There has been a great deal to excite suspicion lately. At several places the creepers on your balcony appear broken off and withered."

"On my balcony?" She drew a step nearer the speaker, overwhelmed by an unutterable fear, and taking hold of her arm said, "What *can* my balcony have to do with Herr von Prell, Anna?"

"Calm yourself, dearest," said the speaker, unable to meet her eyes. "People in my position are bound to keep their eyes open; it is part of their duties. And what I have done has been solely for your sake. . . . Then, how easily could anyone who doesn't know you as I know you misinterpret this climbing on to your balcony——"

Lilly began to cry. "Oh! it's too low—too low!" she sobbed.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger drew her down into the corner of the sofa and stroked her forehead.

"I have experienced worse things than that, dear," she said. "Anyhow, I was determined to get on the right scent, and although it is needless to say I didn't suspect you"—again she averted her eyes—"I took the precaution of watching in the dark outside your door for several nights."

Lilly bounded up. While she had been sleeping innocently unsuspecting, close by, someone had been lurking and keeping watch on her. So much was she a prisoner.

"And this morning at about one o'clock I caught him red-handed. To think of his dare-devilry! He had the audacity to place one of Haberland's ladders against your balcony—that accounts for the broken vine-shoots—and to get in through the glass door of your sitting-room. By the way, dearest, glass doors should never be left open at night. He slunk past your bedroom door into the corridor, without seeing me, of course. Käte is the only one who sleeps anywhere near, and this morning, early, when I taxed her with it she denied nothing. . . . I acted, as I always do in these cases, with



every kindness and consideration. I told Käte that she might be the first to give warning, and that nothing would be said. . . . But what is to be done about the young man? This is his only chance for the future. If the colonel sacks him it will be his ruin. On the other hand, I cannot very well keep silence to the colonel on a point that concerns, in a way, his wife's honour——"

"How do Herr von Prell's intrigues with the housemaids concern my honour?" Lilly ventured to interrupt, hoping, by playing the innocent a little, to gain time for thought as to how her friend was to be helped out of this scrape.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger was beginning to enlighten her on what all the disastrous results might be of such profligate conduct, when the tea-things rattled at the approaching footsteps of the colonel.

"Say nothing . . . yet," implored Lilly; and to hide her fears and confusion she rushed into his arms.

He did not notice that anything was wrong. His once ever-wakeful and easily irritated suspicion had slumbered since he had confided his young wife to the vigilant care of the duenna.

In these days he was no longer the zealous lover, aping the gallantry of youth, who had wished to be master of her every look and word. The playful patronage with which he now regarded the antics of this lovely, gentle-souled child gave him quite a paternal air that became him well. His expeditions to the casino in the nearest garrison town, at first rare, had become more and more frequent. He often went by the afternoon train, but as a rule started after the evening meal, when he did not come home till two or three in the morning, as there were no trains back earlier.

To-day he told them good-humouredly at breakfast that he had to go to town on business, to get rid of the barley crop to the Jews.

A happy thought struck Lilly, filling her with infinite satisfaction. The colonel's absence must be utilised to save *him*. How it was to be done she didn't know. But save him she would. If she did not intervene on his behalf, who else was there to steer this stormy petrel into safe harbour?

When the colonel had retired to his room, she took heart and made her cautious plea to Anna, who, however, declined to relent.

"He will only be worse next time," she said, "and then the disgrace will be greater for all of us."

"Oh no!" said Lilly, "he will not get worse; he will reform. Just give him a lecture."

"I am of an age to do it, certainly," said Fräulein von Schwertfeger, with a sour old-maidish smile, "and I have the authority; but, to speak frankly, the subject is too delicate. I would rather not be mixed up any more in such unpleasant affairs."

The pale eyes, almost hidden under their heavy lids, gazed with that sphinx-like fixity which Lilly had often noticed before—it seemed like the resurrection within her of an old and bitter hate. But she returned to the topic voluntarily. All she would commit herself to was that, if he came of his own free will and apologised, she might listen to him. That was the most she could do without playing a double part.

"But how can he apologise when he has no idea that he has been discovered?" put in Lilly timidly.

"I wouldn't mind betting," replied Fräulein von Schwertfeger, "that Käte will run over to him the first moment she is free."

"But if she doesn't, what then?" asked Lilly, unable to control her eagerness.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger took her face between her hands.

"If I didn't know, my pet, what a dear, ingenuous young creature you were, I might think there was something rather suspicious in your being so keenly interested in this young rake. No, no; you needn't blush. Of course I know there is nothing behind, and, at all events, I will wait till to-morrow afternoon before taking steps—simply because you intercede for him, darling."

Thereupon the conversation ended. Nothing more was to be hoped for from that quarter.

"If I don't save him, he'll be dismissed; and if he is dismissed, he'll inevitably go to the dogs; and if he goes to the dogs, I shall be to blame."

Lilly's thoughts thus revolved in a circle till she felt quite exhausted and giddy.

The most straightforward course would have been to interview Käte, but that would have been beneath her dignity. Besides, it was evident that the poor girl had no thought of running over to warn him. She glided about in a spiritless

fashion, and finally had to be put to bed with an attack of colic.

At four o'clock the colonel drove off to the station. He had stuffed a packet of blue banknotes in his pocket-book first, a sign that he would not be coming back till dawn.

Evening approached. The wheels of the returning manure carts rang on the flags of the yard. The bellow of oxen and the cracking of whips announced that the days' work was over.

Lilly crouched in ambush behind her creeper-covered trellis and watched the bailiff's lodge. At last the ne'er-do-well appeared from his gable end, dragging the unfortunate red foxy dog at the end of a taut chain. He had on a greenish-grey tweed jacket with innumerable pockets, each of which seemed to have something sticking out of it. He looked quite bulky. But, all the same, he was a dear smart little fellow, worth taking some trouble for.

Should she make him a sign, and throw down a note which later he could pick up unobserved? She went into her rooms and scribbled in pencil the following lines.

"Everything is discovered. Fräulein von S—— promises to say nothing provided you——"

Here she paused. This would never do. The stupidest fool who chanced to get hold of the note could only interpret it in one way, *i.e.*, as a confession of guilt.

"I'll speak to him instead," she decided, as the bell sounded for supper.

How curiously the Schwertfeger eyes regarded her, just as if they could read at the bottom of her soul what her bold intention was. But no reference whatever was made to the miscreant, and when they rose from the table she put her arm into Lilly's arm, just as she did when she wanted to keep Lilly from visiting her Polish friends.

"She won't let go the whole evening," thought Lilly, gnashing her teeth inwardly.

At that moment someone came to say Käte was much worse, and should they send for the doctor?

Fräulein von Schwertfeger left the room reluctantly, saying as she went, "I shall be back before long."

In the flash of a moment Lilly had opened the verandah door and was slipping down the terrace steps into the dusky park. The intense silence was only broken by a faint splashing from behind the cypresses, where old Haberland was filling

his cans, as he had not finished watering the rose-trees. She walked straight towards the gable end of the lodge, wondering how she should attract his attention and bring him to the window. She was spared the trouble, however, for he was lying full length on the green bench outside the house, puffing serenely at the end of a cigarette. The red dog, whose chain he had twisted round his wrist, was asleep at his feet. None of his colleagues were to be seen. She could scarcely breathe, her heart beat so violently.

"Herr von Prell!"

He started up, the dog with him.

"Herr von Prell, I've something to say to you."

He grabbed at his head to take off the cap which wasn't there.

"At your service, gracious baroness."

"Will you come and take a little stroll with me?"

"If the gracious baroness wishes, certainly."

He threw away the end of his cigarette, cast a rapid look round for his missing cap, and then walked beside her, bare-headed, as stiff and correct in his bearing as an automaton.

Lilly led the way into the middle of the park, where groups of trees and grassy clearings melted into purple-fringed darkness. She had recovered her calmness. The desire to save him endowed her with a strength of will of which she had never dreamed herself capable.

"You must not misunderstand what I am doing," she began.

"Oh, of course not, gracious baroness," he answered with a polite bow. "It is such a charming evening, and old acquaintances enjoy a chat."

"If that was my object in wishing to see you," Lilly said, unable to conceal that she was hurt, "I should have asked you to the castle. You may conclude from my coming that the matter is something of importance."

"What could be of more importance to me, baroness, than walking here with you?" he replied.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, Herr von Prell, if only you knew the scrape you were in, you would hardly use such empty figures of speech!"

Lilly was amazed at her own haughty tone.

"A scrape, gracious baroness, more or less, what can it matter?" he said, raising his eyebrows. "To be doomed

to live so near and yet so far from a certain fair lady is all that matters. The question is whether Tommy and I have enough moral fibre to endure such a trial with patience—Tommy, don't be an ass! Our gracious baroness has no objection to you as long as you don't chew her train." And he began tugging the wilful little dog off his forelegs as if he were some mechanical toy.

"You'll throttle the poor animal if you don't take care," said Lilly, glad to revert momentarily to less personal topics.

"Then he will suffer like his master," he retorted, catching at his throat to illustrate his meaning and gasping horribly.

Such conduct must not be tolerated a moment longer. She owed it to herself and her position.

"I suppose that you are quite unaware, Herr von Prell, that probably by this time to-morrow you will have been dismissed?" she said lightly.

At last he seemed impressed. He scowled and twirled the fine ends of his young moustache. Then, knitting his brows, he said:

"However bad things may be going, there is some satisfaction to be derived from the fact that the gracious baroness seems to take not a little interest in my affairs."

Now Lilly was really angry. "I wonder you are not ashamed, Herr von Prell!" she exclaimed. "Here am I running great risks to help you, and giving myself a lot of trouble, and yet you persist in talking nonsense."

"We must be careful, Tommy—careful," he said, lifting the fox-like dog in his arms. "First, we are flayed alive, then kicked. But we ought to find comfort in the consciousness that we are innocent, my poor Tommy."

"Please don't try to excuse yourself," she scolded. "Fräulein von Schwertfeger has found out everything . . . about your connection with . . . you know—your nocturnal excursions to my balcony and entrance through my sitting-room. Everything! Do you suppose that it is any pleasure to me to have to treat you, whom I have always liked, as a criminal? Do you suppose I wouldn't much rather have reason to be proud of you than to see you sent away in disgrace? If you can say anything in your own defence so much the better. I shall be pleased to hear it."

*She had worked herself up into such a fever of righteous*

indignation that she quite overlooked the impropriety of her present proceedings.

Now she was enacting a *rôle* that enchanted her. She was the benevolent chatelaine, doing her best to rescue an inferior, and her breast swelled with a sense of her exalted virtue. They had emerged from the dusky shadows of the ancient avenue of limes, a ray of light from the afterglow in the west pierced the boughs and suffused his thin freckled face with a deep flush. He appeared to be absolutely crushed and penitent, and Lilly was already regretting that she had been too hard on him.

"I quite see," he began after a pause, and his voice trembled with suppressed emotion, "that I ought to clear myself from such a grave imputation. I am asked to set up a defence, and I can; but in so doing I am forced to reveal a secret . . . and I am not sure whether it would be fair to your gracious baroness to enlighten you on the awful failing that has shipwrecked my whole life."

"Tell me at once what it is," urged Lilly, burning with curiosity.

"Well, if you must know, it is this. From childhood I have been pursued by a ghastly fate, which overcomes me at moments when I am most powerless, and fastens on me the responsibility for crimes of which I am utterly innocent. Be prepared, therefore, to hear something terrible. I am—I am a somnambulist."

As he glanced sideways at Lilly, there was such a droll, wicked twinkle playing under the light lashes that she burst into a fit of light laughter. He joined in with his dear old noiseless giggle that shook him like an earthquake. So they stood still and both laughed till they cried; and Lilly forgot all about her exalted duties as chatelaine and her mission of salvation. Then, instinctively, their footsteps turned together into the most deserted and overgrown part of the park, where its bounds were lost in a dense thicket of birches. It grew darker at every step. The foxy little dog had abandoned himself to his fate and trotted obediently after his master.

"The truth is, my dear friend," said he, when they had recovered partially from their levity—"why should I make any false pretences?—I am a poor fish here floundering out of water. Can you imagine what it is to have to lead a vegetable existence in the society of plebeians, and from morning

to night practise the arts of virtue and seriousness? I can assure you it's often as bitter as a dose of aloes. Tommy helps me over the worst hours, but even Tommy is sometimes a disappointment. . . . May I take this opportunity, by-the-by, of asking you a very interesting question, my gracious baroness?"

Delighted at his returning gravity Lilly assented.

"Can you move your ears up and down?"

She was again seized with laughter as with an illness. She leaned against the trunk of a tree, and struggled in vain with her merriment, while he continued in a tone of profound despondency.

"I mastered this modest accomplishment, of which I am not in the least proud, when I was in the Quinta at school. There it was considered the very acme of attainments, and I thought it would be a nice trick to teach my Tommy, who, however, declined to be taught it, though I have wasted hours and expended a lot of mental effort in trying to make him. But one day, by accident, I found out that he could do it much better than I ever could. I came to the conclusion, too, that he had been able to do it all along when *he* liked, but not when *I* liked. Is that not very depressing, a symbol of the utter fruitlessness of all human endeavour? Indeed, my dearest baroness, I believe I shall be compelled to become philosopher, out of sheer unutterable boredom."

Lilly could see nothing now but the outline of his figure, behind which the eyes of the foxy one glowed like balls of fire. Not since her schooldays had she enjoyed such a bout of pure fun, and she had to wait for a break in her laughter to remind him that it was time to be going home. He turned obediently, changing Tommy's chain from one hand to the other.

The danger that threatened him seemed to be totally forgotten. As time was precious, Lilly took the bull by the horns and told him what Fräulein von Schwertfeger's conditions were for keeping silence. But she could not regain the dignified pose of a Lady Bountiful holding out the rescuing hand with an air of sublime superiority, and every now and then she broke off in what she was saying to giggle.

"I know that good lady's unquenchable penchant for treading on other people's toes," he said; "but since we have got into her bad graces, dear little Tommy and I will have to

wriggle out. I am grateful to you, my dear and gracious friend. I will take your hint and put myself on the right road to absolution. I'll polish up my vocabulary of repentance. I'll be more than repentant. I'll be cheeky. That works on these respectable spinsters like magic; and I'll kill two birds with one stone, and take care, while I am about it, to improve our future chances of intercourse—always supposing that your majesty is agreeable."

Oh, how very agreeable she was! "But how will you manage it?" she asked anxiously.

"Leave it to me," he answered. "Your duenna is a clever old girl, but I am even cleverer. I shan't be surprised if after to-morrow I am honoured with warm invitations to supper at the castle, which will be very convenient; and I shall, I warrant, succeed in looking into the eyes of my queen, unobserved by the two mighty watchdogs."

There was much in this speech that jarred on her. He might make fun of Fräulein von Schwertfeger if he liked—she was fair game; but of the colonel he ought to speak with respect. And now that she had satisfied herself that he was out of danger did she first fully realise how atrocious his conduct had been, and how weak it was of her to be strolling about with him in the dark, tolerating his silly jokes.

"Allow me to remind you, Herr von Prell," she said, "that it is only owing to our former friendship I have warned you. Having done it, we had better be strangers in future. I must go now. Good-night."

Whereupon she began to run away from him. But, as she sprang along the dark woodland path without looking round, suddenly something warm, soft, and slippery slipped between her feet. She cried out shrilly, and turned back to seek Prell's help; at the same moment the chain got twisted round her ankle and held her fast.

The foxy little dog in his eager desire to get home had taken her flight as a signal to break loose from his master's restraining hold, and had run under her skirts. The more she pressed forward the more painfully did the chain cut into her flesh. It was all over now with her anger.

Herr von Prell had to kneel down and hold the little rascal in his arms till she had released her foot from its chain trap.

"Tommy, Tommy, what mischief have we done? We have hurt our mistress's august foot. That comes of straining



on our chains and getting under ladies' skirts. A grave offence. Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you scoundrel ? "

And then he imprinted a kiss on the dog's sharp-pointed little nose.

" Doesn't he ever bite you ? " she asked, interested.

" He has had the advantage of a rigorous military training," he replied, " and consequently he is used to kisses."

She burst out into a new fit of merriment, and he held out to her the struggling woolly little animal, asking her if she would like to kiss Tommy too.

Laughing, she declined ; laughing, she walked on in his company. " Weak as ever," she told herself.

Still in fits of silvery laughter, she came into the lighted hall, where Fräulein von Schwertfeger met her, with large reproachful eyes.

" Where have you been child ? " she asked, prepared on the spot to subject her to a calm and judicial cross-questioning.

" Oh, he's such fun ! " was all Lilly could gurgle forth as she buried her face, flushed from laughing, on her duenna's shoulder. " Such fun ! "

" You don't mean to say—— ? "

" Yes, I do. Do you think I would leave him in the lurch, my charming little old pal ? "

The Schwertfeger countenance froze into rigidity.

Lilly, with a whoop of joy, freed herself from the elder woman's arm, flew to her room, nestled her head in the pillows, and laughed herself to sleep.

## CHAPTER XVIII

IT was begun in laughter—and with laughter it continued. The next morning when Lilly awoke the objects round her—the lamp, the washstand, the sentimental pictures on the wall—seemed to have taken on a different aspect, and the sun shone in at the windows with redoubled brilliance.

In her night clothes she stood before the glass and smiled again at the reflection she saw there; it was the face of a gamin, with eyes roguish and sparkling, and a tipped-up saucy nose.

At breakfast she scintillated with small witticisms, chased the stiff-kneed colonel round the table, and cherished sentiments of glowing gratitude towards Fräulein von Schwertfeger. She on her side smiled eloquently to herself, and when the colonel had retired, chucked Lilly under the chin, and said, "What a child you are!"

She made no allusion to the confession that had escaped Lilly the night before. It almost seemed that it had not been heard.

Lilly ran up to her balcony, pushed apart the creepers, and gave him a nod to come in as he walked up and down uncertainly between the castle and the bailiff's office. He understood her signal, bowed low, and disappeared in the direction of the terrace steps.

What passed between him and Fräulein von Schwertfeger remained a secret. There was no finding out whether she interrogated him on his previous relations with the young baroness. But that the result of the interview as a whole was successful there could be no question. Instead of the colonel giving him his *congé*, the colonel himself brought him in to supper that evening. He wore his best coat, white waistcoat, his most respectful expression, and looked as if he was going to sink into his collar.

"A little bird tells me," said the colonel to Lilly, "that Herr von Prell is rather dull and lonely over there sometimes. So, if you have no objection, we will ask him in oftener than we have done."

She hadn't the very least objection, only the thought that Käte might appear any moment in the doorway prevented her from speaking.

Instead of Käte another maid handed old Ferdinand the plates and dishes. Lilly's eyes turned inquiringly to Fräulein von Schwertfeger, who said, in an undertone so that the men should not hear, "The poor girl, owing to her illness, has gone home, and probably will not come back."

Lilly squeezed her hand under the table from sheer relief. She had a dim notion that Käte had been sent away to spare her unpleasantness.

The other two were deep in cavalry talk, much interlarded by technical terms and dry names.

Herr von Prell leaned towards his old superior officer, blinking his lids with reverential and eager attention. The colonel laid down the law like a wrathful deity, spoke in gruff, fierce tones, and shot about him dagger-like glances, as if there were enemies all round to mow down, which of course was mere professional vainglory.

Lilly listened, and would have liked to join in. But apparently both men had forgotten her existence, and she became depressed and jealous without being exactly sure which of them she was most angry with.

When Prell rose to take his leave, the colonel laid his hand on his shoulder, and asked :

"Why haven't we done this before, my boy?" And the look he gave Lilly seemed to add, "There has really been no necessity for so much caution." After this, Prell's invitations to supper became more frequent as the September days grew chillier, and the colonel's gout made his visits to the town rarer. Groaning and swearing he mounted his horse with difficulty, but he would not listen to Lilly's entreaties to him to give up the early morning ride.

"I might ride round the place instead of you," she said, "if you weren't so ridiculously nervous about my having an accident."

The colonel and Anna exchanged glances.

"It certainly is a disgrace," he remarked, "that the girl

hasn't learnt yet to sit on a horse. She ought to be taught. What do you say, Anna? Can we trust that scamp Prell to give her riding lessons?"

Lilly's face beamed with delight.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger's lids were lowered meditatively. After a few moments' silence she raised them, and said very slowly and emphatically:

"If the harum-scarum young man brought our pet home one day with a broken arm or leg, what should we do? I think the proposal, at any rate, needs to be further considered."

Lilly forbore from expressing her longing, and did not contradict Anna, who, however, must have divined her thoughts, for when they were alone together she suddenly said, taking Lilly's face between her hands:

"Dismiss the idea from your mind, darling. Take my word for it, it will be best."

It was about this time that Lilly, who loved to explore the spacious and only partly inhabited old castle, made a remarkable discovery that excited her curiosity not a little. In one of the guest chambers on the third floor, which was hardly ever used, she was rummaging one day in the drawers of a bureau when she came across a transparent garment of silver net, fringed with spangles and fastened at the shoulder by curious barbaric clasps. It resembled the one in which, in the Dresden days, she had danced at bedtime, and which now lay at the bottom of her wardrobe enjoying undisturbed repose. She had never shown it to Fräulein von Schwertfeger, being somewhat ashamed of it. But this duplicate she folded up and took downstairs to her friend, for she was anxious to learn its history.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger looked up from her account-books abstractedly till she saw the glitter of spangles in the sun, and then a shudder convulsed her whole frame, her eyes became distended, and she seemed as paralysed with horror as if she had seen a ghost.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" laughed Lilly.

"I thought I had thrown away all the rubbish," she said, and gave herself a little shake.

She snatched the flimsy thing out of Lilly's hands, rolled it in a sheet of paper, and took it to the kitchen. Lilly, who followed, saw a thin cloud of smoke rise from the hearth,

carrying with it a whirl of charred tinsel rags. Old Grete stood by, glancing first at Anna and then at Lilly in perturbed surprise.

She appeared to know of what transactions the discovery was evidence, but when asked by Lilly to explain she held her tongue.

"I was not much here, but away in the town," she excused herself, "when the colonel was there with the regiment, you know. Ask the Fräulein; she will tell you."

The Fräulein would not tell. With grimly compressed lips and vacant gaze she avoided the subject, and for three days or more scarcely answered when Lilly spoke to her.

Then suddenly, as they sat at supper, without any apparent cause, her whole manner changed. She became facetious and talkative, and sympathetic towards her employer, suggesting remedies for his gout and wringing from him a promise to give up the injurious morning ride.

"I have been thinking over Lilly's riding lessons," she went on. "I really don't think there can be any danger after all in entrusting her to the boy, if one of us is present to see that all is right—anyhow at the start."

Lilly gave a sigh of joy, but neither by her eyes nor facial expression did she betray the smallest sign of pleasure, so severely in the meantime had she learned to school herself.

The next morning the lesson began.

Walter von Prell appeared in riding get-up. His body was bent forward as much as to say, "I await orders," and his whole bearing bespoke submissive respect as he stood first on one foot, then on the other.

A quiet grey mare, with narrow flanks and somewhat overstrained forelegs, but a smart, well-groomed little mount, had been chosen for the first ride. Her instructor explained to her the principle on which bridle and bit were constructed, showed her how the girths were buckled, how the snaffle and curb-reins were to be held, and how to prevent the curb throttling the horse.

Then came learning to mount. When Lilly planted her foot in his joined hands she felt a warm thrill creep up her spine to the back of her neck, as if this contact were a sign of the secret understanding between them.

He counted "One, two, three," and, presto! there she was in the saddle.

The colonel clapped and applauded, and Walter blushed to the roots of his fair hair with delight.

Henceforth he had the game in his hands.

"Who would have thought that jackanapes had so much of the pedagogue in him?" the colonel remarked to Fraulein von Schwertfeger, who nodded silently and drew a deep breath as if something weighed on her mind.

When Lilly dismounted she had learnt how to draw in the reins and slacken them, and to turn to right and left. She had even got as far as a trot round the yard. The colonel said good-humouredly she promised to be the most dashing horse-woman in the army.

One lesson followed another. Either the colonel or Anna was always present, so there was little opportunity for a confidential conversation. Walter did not drop his stiff and obsequious manner, though Lilly longed for a flash of the old devilry that she alone understood.

Then came a day when it happened that both sentinels were absent from duty. The colonel was busy giving directions for the making of a covered riding-way where his gouty limbs would not be exposed to chills, and Fräulein von Schwertfeger was nowhere to be found.

Lilly's heart beat fast as she and her merry friend met, and she gave him her hand with a smile of suppressed triumph. He responded with a sly wink in the direction of the terrace, where her duenna was wont to stand.

"She's nowhere to be seen," whispered Lilly.

"What are we to do, then," he said, wringing his hands in mock lamentation, "without the protecting eye of the illustrious Fräulein? How are we to mount?"

The September sky was very blue; a crisp breeze, heavy with the perfume of damp freshly turned sods, blew across the courtyard. He pointed with his whip to the open gate. She laughed and nodded assent. The next moment she cantered beside him along the grassy road, whither no Argus eye could follow them, inwardly rejoicing and exultantly scenting all sorts of mad pranks. But he seemed unwilling to make the most of their unexpected freedom. He kept his eyes fixed in front of him; every now and then he caught at her rein, altered her stirrups or corrected her seat in the saddle. He was the riding-master and nothing more.

"What's Tommy doing?" she asked, finding things dull.

"Tommy sends his love," he answered with his gaze still fastened on the road, "and wishes to say that to-day we had better attend to the horses, for if anything happens we shall not be allowed out again."

"My love to Tommy," she retorted, "and tell him he's a little goose."

"I'll not forget," he said, and bowed over the saddle.

They came to a coppice of larch-trees where the ground was slightly boggy and required careful crossing. But she saw nothing but the silver sheen of the trunks, and the golden mist made by the delicate leaves dancing in the breeze and nearly brushing her cheek.

"Oh, look, how lovely!" she said with a sigh of satisfaction.

Then a demon within her prompted her to an act of madness. She touched the mare with her whip and started off on a wild gallop, regardless of all the rules and regulations laid down by her riding-master.

In a few seconds he came up with her, seized her bridle, and with a dexterous jerk brought both horses to a standstill.

Their eyes flashed into each other. She felt as if she must throw herself on to his saddle to be nearer him at any cost.

"What do you mean by that, dear little comrade?" he roared.

"And what do you mean by calling me 'dear little comrade'?" she retorted.

Then they turned their horses and walked them slowly and in silence homewards.

## CHAPTER XIX

FOR a long time the threshing-machine had been in tune for its autumn song. Far beyond the courtyard, penetrating every wall and hedge, its melancholy hum was now heard. There was no suggestion in it of golden harvest blessings and consolidated sunshine. Like an Æolian harp it moaned and howled from morn to eve in the storm-tossed branches. Sometimes it seemed to shriek as if the sheaves of grain it tore and tortured had found a voice wherewith to express their agony.

Once more Lilly's soul was so full of dreamy bliss that she heard in this music nothing but a seductive yearning. It impregnated her morning slumber, and often she lay with closed eyes half awake so as to listen the better to the monotonous singsong. And all the time he was in her thoughts. What she had always wanted was now hers—a playmate, a comrade; someone to rejoice and grumble with; someone who confessed all his sins to her, the very blackest, and then received a laughing absolution. Then whatever he did, he himself was not guilty; it was the youth in him that sinned, the same sweet, wicked youth that charged her own soul with melancholy and filled her body with thrills, which dominated them both like a tormenting deity, smiling on one and frowning on the other.

Yes, he must be saved; saved from his own folly, from that fatal cynicism of his which threatened to enmesh him in a network of vulgar intrigues. There was no silencing the rumours of the sort of life he was leading. She had only to set foot in the servants' quarters to hear the stream of unsavoury gossip of which he was the subject. All that must be ended. Her first interference was to be but the beginning of the great mission she had to perform in his life. She would be his good genius, standing in his path with raised hands to ward off all



horrid temptations, so that he should become as pure and devoid of evil desires as herself.

So she dreamed to the accompaniment of the threshing-machine's melody.

The first ride outside the castle gates, though taken without leave, was praised and approved; permission was given for others to follow. But Lilly hesitated. She would like to be sure of her cantering powers, she said, before venturing on unknown ground. The truth was, she was dying for another such hour, and only lacked the courage to hurry it on.

The very next morning he had been the stern unbending riding-master again, treating her with extravagant courtesy. She had thought he would be certain to whisper tenderly, "little comrade," or some other familiar greeting—he could have found the opportunity if he had liked—but nothing of the sort came to pass either this time or the next.

They had no thought indeed of riding beyond the courtyard for several lessons after, till one day the colonel himself issued the command.

"Enough of this ambling about round the yard. Go out and let the wind of the fields blow through you," he said.

"As the colonel wishes," replied Walter, with his hand raised to his cap in salute, and he turned her horse with his own towards the open gates.

Her heart stood still, and she forgot to send back a farewell greeting over her shoulder, so occupied was she with the contemplation of coming delights.

In a minute they were riding in the same direction as they had followed ten days ago, when the great event had taken place. The weeping willows dripped with dew, and at the slightest movement showered down drops upon her. Lilly laughed and shook them off. Instead of joining in the sport, he tried to make her keep to the middle of the road.

"But I love getting wet," she protested.

"Very well, if the gracious baroness pleases," he answered with his stupid exaggerated formality.

They rode on in silence. When they came to the place where ten days before the great event had happened to which all his conduct to-day gave the lie, she dared to shoot a reminiscent side glance at him. But he made no response, and appeared not to see. His cap pulled down over the back of his head as far as his neck, his thin smooth face sprinkled

with dewdrops, his boyish figure all muscle and sinews, he sat his horse as if he and the animal were one.

"How fond I am of him, in spite of everything, dear little fellow!" she thought, and pictured what her desolation would be if one day he were suddenly to vanish from the scene. And then she realised all at once that her equable gaiety of soul, the feeling of living her life to the full, were all due to his nearness to her day after day.

They rode along even ground steadily. The chain of brown ridges on the far side of the river came nearer, and he seemed to be steering for these; but this did not serve her purpose, for the hour of serious converse had sounded. To-day or never! And with a laborious effort of thought she began to calculate all the things she had to say to him. But she could not arrange them methodically in her mind, especially as her attention was half taken up by her horse. In the saddle she was too completely at his mercy, so plucking up courage she proposed that they should dismount. While he paused to consider she sprang to the ground, and he had to be quick to catch the mare's snaffle.

He scolded her a little, but finally had to do as she wished. They proceeded on foot, and he led the horses.

The road lay through a marshy declivity where there was a scanty growth of alders and oaks. Yellow marigold buds starred the damp ground and burr reed spread out its prickly fruit on distorted branches. Red-dock leaves swayed on their withered stalks, and sedgy grass curled itself up in anticipation of autumn frosts. A mountain ash felled by a recent storm bridged the ditch at the side of the road. Its scarlet berries, which should have been dead, still glowed like fire, as if deriving life from some mysterious source of their own.

"I should like to sit down here," she said.

He bowed acquiescence.

"But you must sit down too."

"I must hold the horses, gracious baroness."

"You can tie them to a tree."

He reflected a moment. "So I can," he said, and knotted the reins to the fallen trunk.

Then when he came to sit beside her she shifted her position more towards the middle to make room. Her feet hung in the air over the ditch-water. He pushed himself after her along the tree, hand over hand.

"That's far enough," she said ; for she did not want him too close.

"Very well, gracious baroness," he answered, and swung his legs.

The formality of his address caused her fresh annoyance.

"Don't you think when we are alone together you might drop titles ?" she asked, looking him straight in the eyes.

"I might . . . but I mustn't."

"But how about the other day ?"

"Oh, the other day was my birthday," he answered, "and as I wanted a pretty little present I gave myself that !"

"And 'o-day is *my* birthday," she jested. "What present am I to be given ?"

"Anything the gracious baroness likes."

"Then I like you to call me 'Comrade.'"

"Always, or just once in a way ?"

"Always."

"Shall I call you comrade, or be comrade ?"

"Be comrade ; be—be comrade. That's the chief thing !" she cried.

"A bargain," he said, and cautiously crept a little nearer along the wobbling trunk to give her his right hand.

"A bargain," she said, and shook hands.

"But there are other items to be settled in connection with this," he said, clearing his throat.

"What are they ?"

"Well, for one thing, does a comradeship mean Christian names ?"

"Certainly not," Lilly replied, feeling that she was making a great sacrifice.

He accepted the condition as final, and said submissively, "Just as you like, comrade."

Now was her chance to speak out. She drew a deep breath and said :

"You know I want to talk seriously to you, Herr von Prell."

"Ugh !" he ejaculated, prepared for a bad quarter of an hour, as he gnawed his gloved thumbs.

Lilly plunged off at a tangent. She would not say anything about his last misdemeanour, for bad as it was, it was all over, and what was forgiven ought also to be forgotten. But if he imagined that the loose life he had been leading was a

secret in the castle household, he was very much mistaken. It was an open scandal, and even the laundry and scullery-maids sniggered about it ; but how could he expect anything else after . . . Here she enumerated the sum total of his misdoings, as she had gleaned them from remarks the servants had let fall.

She was ashamed to retail them. This was not what she had intended to say at all. . . . She had wanted to speak grandly of the high purpose of human existence, the nobility of self-renunciation, the glory of pure and lofty ideals, of the spiritual tie uniting the elect on earth, and so on. But inspiration failed her when she saw him sitting there with bent shoulders and turning his big toes inwards so that under the soft leather of his riding-boots they looked like excrescences, and she could think of nothing better.

He did not interrupt her. Even when she had done he was silent, absorbed in watching an insect wriggling in circles on the surface of the water.

"Have you no answer," she asked, "after all the disgraceful things I have accused you of?"

"What should I answer, most learned judge?" he retorted. "My one claim to distinction is that I am absolutely devoid of moral sense. Do you want me to lose it?"

"If you are so weak and have no reliance on yourself," she exclaimed in growing zeal, "let me be your mainstay and support. Lean on me, your friend, adviser, your——"

"Foster-father," he suggested, and stirred the slime in the ditch with his whip.

She awakened to the fact that what she had said had not made the least impression ; he was laughing at her all the time.

"Get up and let me pass," she said. "Why should I try to do my best for someone who is not worth it?"

He made no sign of moving from his place.

"Now, look here, comrade," he said, pointing down at the black mirror of ditch-water. "There goes a water-spider with its legs in the air and its head downwards. If you were to ask it why it swims like that, it would say because it knows no other way. That's its nature. Well, do you see, it's my nature. What's to be done? You can't alter it."

"Anyone can restrain his evil passions," she exclaimed, flaring up in indignation. "Anyone can, if he likes, keep

his eyes fixed on a high ideal and struggle to attain it—can listen to a friend when she would help, and say to him——”

“ Well, what would the friend say ? ” he asked ingratiatingly, swinging himself nearer.

She did not answer. She had put her hands before her face and was crying—crying till her sobs convulsed her body.

“ For God’s sake, sit still ! ” he exclaimed, circling his arms towards her, for on the wobbling trunk of the mountain ash she might at any moment lose her balance. “ Child, dear little comrade, sit still.”

She quivered all over. She heard nothing but the sweet, caressing, criminal “ dear little comrade,” which her soul had been yearning to hear.

And then he promised her to turn over a new leaf. He would not flirt any more. He would give up tippling with the bailiffs ; he would read stiff agricultural literature ; he would do anything—oh, what wouldn’t he do ?—if she would only stop crying.

“ Give me your word of honour ? ” she asked, raising her wet, reddened eyes to his.

He gave it without hesitation.

Comforted and grateful, she smiled at him.

“ You’ll never repent it,” she said. “ I’ll stand by you. I’ll be a true friend, and do all I can for you.”

“ All that the two watch-dogs permit,” he added.

To-day she didn’t mind his saying “ two watch-dogs.” She shrugged her shoulders and said, “ Yes, of course, what *they* permit.”

Then they both laughed so heartily that they narrowly escaped falling into the ditch, after all.

## CHAPTER XX

**T**HEN came a delightful time in which she played hide-and-seek with her emotions: drank long draughts from the never-exhausted fount of pleasures anticipated and rehearsed, fulfilled and enjoyed, which left behind them a delightful after-taste and a glow of memories. Every day brought new happiness and a boundless wealth of experience.

Often when Lilly opened the shutters and the rosy September dawn greeted her, she felt as if the Creator had spread a mantle spun out of golden sunbeams across the sky on purpose to wrap them in cosy seclusion, so that the whole of the world beneath vanished, leaving them alone, clinging to one another intoxicated with laughter and light.

She felt that she grew lovelier from day to day, that there was a sort of radiance surrounding her that made everyone she met gaze at her with admiring wonder, and with a little sadness too, as one looks at a flower unfolding too proudly, too gloriously, for its miracle of blossom to endure.

The two watch-dogs were not blind to the change in her.

The colonel, who was full of craft and guile, failed to diagnose in this case the symptoms. His suspicions would have been aroused directly if she had been melancholy and absent-minded, had hung about him nervously, in alternate moods of fervid affection and cold estrangement. Then he would have subjected her to a severe espionage. But her yielding tenderness and happy serenity was a riddle to which he could find no solution; so he gave it up, and tolerated with paternal equanimity his young wife's rollicking gaiety and the embraces she lavished on him to give vent to the ecstasy within her.

Anna von Schwertfeger was also apparently well satisfied with Lilly's happy state of mind and radiant spirits. She

seemed as little as the colonel to think it suspicious, or to associate it with the influence of a third person, otherwise she would scarcely have countenanced so willingly the frequent meetings of the two young people.

Lilly now did her best to return the worthy Anna's warm affection, the display of which at first had worried her and left her cold. Fräulein von Schwertfeger often drew her in the evening into her own private room, where she sat with her account-books. It was quite an old-maids' paradise, with its canaries in cages, plants and flower-pots, and faded photographs of family groups and friends. It was full of old bits of china and gilded knick-knacks, such as one meets in ancient and impoverished houses as relics of former grandeur. Or she would come at an incredibly late hour stealing into Lilly's bedroom, seat herself on the bed, and not move till the wheels of the colonel's returning carriage were heard on the gravel. Then there would be discussions on such profound topics as life and death, the loneliness of old age, and the exuberance of youth, which caused grief and trouble when indulged in to excess. She asked no questions, she gave no warnings, yet the astonishing irrelevance with which she jumped from one subject to another, often contradicting flatly her own opinions, indicated that her thoughts were really far, far away.

While her voice droned on monotonously, Lilly sometimes looked up and caught her eyes fastened on her with a expression of melancholy compassion that she was at a loss to understand. Then she was kissed and stroked with such heartfelt, pitying tenderness that she felt touched, and when left alone in the dark began to be afraid of something, as if an avenging fate crouched at the foot of her bed ready to spring on her and devour her.

What misfortune could possibly fall upon her? Was she not securer and more sheltered than she had ever been? Whom did she deceive? What was her offence? And even if her innocent relations with Walter should come to light, would she merit any severer punishment than a lecture such as children get when they have been careless?

These reflections consoled her even before the after-taste of those nocturnal visitations had been lost in blissful dreams.

September wore to a close. Nearly every day brought a ride or an apparently chance meeting at twilight in a deserted

part of the park. They would discern each other from afar lingering at some appointed rendezvous, and if a previous arrangement for meeting were frustrated, they resorted to the pea-shooter.

By means of this accommodating instrument, which he had brought back one day from the town—and in a corner of her balcony passed as a superfluous curtain-rod—she was able to blow her messages through the vine tendrils straight in at his open window. Sometimes it was a simple "Good-morning, comrade," at others an appointment to meet, or a harmless joke born on the spur of the moment's gaiety.

On the evenings that the colonel was at home he was usually invited to join them. Then, of course, he assumed his most correct and formal manner, though there was often opportunity for a little by-play between them, so skilfully managed that the watch-dogs remained quite unsuspecting.

Nevertheless, Lilly had a rival on these occasions, which she feared and hated, because it deprived her of the "comrade's" attention for hours. Its very mention was enough to reduce Lilly to a mere cipher. This rival was the Regiment. It was the time of the autumn manoeuvres, and both men followed with feverish interest the tactical movements of their old division as reported in the newspapers.

One evening they despatched a joint picture-postcard congratulating the Regiment, and a day or two later the compliment was returned, a card arriving through the post scribbled over with numerous signatures, which it was the work of the world to make out. Two or three were abandoned as hopeless, till at last Walter hit on a solution. They belonged to three outside lieutenants who had joined the regiment for the manoeuvres, and had signed their names with the other officers—von Hölten, Dehnicke, von Berg. They made no impression on Lilly, except that "Dehnicke" struck her as sounding a little bourgeois and discordant amongst the music of the old patrician "vons."

This greeting from his active past seemed to affect the colonel unpleasantly. He became moody and cantankerous, and Lilly felt his eye upon her now and then full of a grim savage reproach that made her jump with terror. Henceforth his expeditions to the neighbouring garrison town became more frequent than ever, and when an invitation to join a shooting party arrived, he didn't refuse, in spite of his gout.



The first Sunday in October came. The colonel started off early to visit a neighbour, and was not expected to return till late at night.

A soft grey mist, shot with violet and gold, as a promise of sunshine later, enveloped the world, when Lilly, arm-in-arm with Fräulein von Schwertfeger, came out of church, almost groaning—she had been so bored.

The sunflowers in the labourers' cottage gardens were already drooping their scorched heads, and the asters showed signs of having suffered from the first severe nip of frost. Yet the air was balmy and sweet-scented as spring, and larks made a Jabel in the fields.

"To-day, to-day!" thought Lilly, and stretched herself in a vague longing for private talk and jubilant pranks.

It seemed as if her thoughts had been heard, for Anna von Schwertfeger asked suddenly, "What is the matter with you to-day?"

"I hardly know myself," Lilly answered, blushing. "I just feel as if to-day were a festival."

Anna looked at her sideways, then, clearly emphasising every word, she said, "I really might make a festival of it, and visit a friend in the town. But the colonel being away, I don't know whether . . ."

Lilly started so violently that for a moment she could not recover her breath. Then she pulled herself together tactfully, and urged her companion to go. She had not had a day off all the summer. She lived like a prisoner, and must sorely need a holiday.

Anna nodded meditatively, and the fixed glassy stare that Lilly did not like came into her eyes.

At the midday meal, which the two ladies took alone to-day, she was still undecided, but directly it was over she ordered the carriage and drove off without a word. Lilly, who, instead of resting, had been watching from the upstairs landing, now flew to the pea-shooter. The dense foliage of the Virginian creeper still so completely shut her in that he could not catch a glimpse of her. But she saw him as he sat at the open window frowning over his book.

"My good influence!" she thought triumphantly; and it seemed almost a pity to decoy him away from his improving occupation.

The steward and book-keeper were pacing up and down,

not far from the house, smoking their Sunday afternoon cigar ; so it was necessary to be more cautious than usual.

The paper pellet that conveyed her message hit him on the forehead and rebounded on to the grass outside. So well had he himself in hand that he did not so much as raise his eyes to show he understood, but a few minutes later he let his book fall out of the window, as if by accident, and rose indifferently to pick it up.

Half an hour afterwards they met behind the carp-pond. He had on a new black-and-white check suit similar to the fateful one worn by the foreigner that night in the railway carriage.

"You are much too fine for me to-day," joked Lilly. "I would rather not be seen with you."

"That would be an awful shame," he remarked, "for I ordered these things on purpose for this day's outing."

"Why?"

"Because it's to be our festival."

"What has put that into your head?" stammered Lilly, shocked to think of the communion of ideas it testified to.

"A fellow has his presentiments," he replied, smiling significantly.

Simultaneously they turned their footsteps to the secluded beech-wood, whither they had wandered in the deepening dusk on the evening they had renewed their friendship.

"Where's Tommy?" she asked, thinking of the third member of their alliance.

"He's biting a hole in the boards," was the answer, "and making himself a kennel to his own mind. He roosts in it like a screech-owl. I shouldn't advise you to put the finger you wear your rings on into it; you'd lose the rings and possibly the finger too."

"Why do you let him get so wild?" she asked reproachfully.

"Why do I let myself get so wild?" he asked in turn.

"Oh, you—you know you are becoming quite tame and gentle," she replied, regarding him affectionately because it was all her doing.

"You really think so?" he asked; and his aspect assumed the masterfulness of his lieutenant day.

"Of course I do. Didn't you give me your word of honour?" she boasted.

" Rot ! "

Still Lilly gloried in the success of her work of salvation.

" You may underrate my influence if you like," she replied, " but I can assure you everyone else notices the change in you. Herr Leichtweg says you are always punctual now ; and then you borrowed that great agricultural encyclopædia from the colonel—that greatly impressed him—and Fräulein von Schwertfeger declares you look quite ' delicious ' in these days ! "

" Come, baronissima, shall we have a game of catch ? " he asked. " It will be good for the circulation of your noble blood."

At once with a shout of joy she started off running at a mad pace up the slope, which was veiled in the purple autumnal haze. But she didn't go far. She caught her foot in the plaid that she had refused to let him carry for her, and fell full length on the ground. He was there in a moment to help her up, yet the fall had cured her of her desire to run.

They walked on at a sedate pace and climbed the heights on the other side, whence their eyes could wander over a sea of waving foliage right away to the open country. The beeches glowed pure red, the maples danced in all the colours of the rainbow, the birches quivered like slender flames of fire, the elm let fall coins of gold, while the oak alone retained the sombre green of his late summer dress. With folded hands she gazed at the distance, which was lost in a veil of violet.

The sun went down behind vagrant shafts of fire from out the lap of gilt-edged clouds. A band of rosy mist lined the horizon, spangled with sparks from the sun's reflection.

" Shall we sit down here ? " he asked.

" No, not here," she answered, seized with a vague anxiety ; " here I should soon begin to cry."

She ran on ahead of him, back into wood, and found the path again beside the brook. Here it was as dark as evening, but the magic of the sun's radiance was still felt, and filled her with worship of Nature.

Oh, how happy she was ! how happy !

No danger, nothing to be afraid of . . . not even of her own secret heart . . . for he with whom she was walking was her comrade and playfellow—nothing more. He

must not, could not, be anything more. She felt conscious of no evil ; he gave her no furtive glances of desire, and she did not try to lead him on.

The bond between them and everything connected with it was above-board and clear as daylight, and though it was politic to keep it from others, there was not the least sin to hide. Their intercourse was purely fun for both.

She wanted to take his hand in her warm-hearted, impulsive way, but refrained in case her action should be misunderstood. Thus side by side they went on till they reached the spot where the brook, confined in a basin of rotten wood, gushed with a low murmur out of the earth. The pale green mossy floor was covered with rugged fronds of red-lined ferns, and leaves from the branches of the beeches fluttered down lazily.

" Here is the place to rest," said Lilly.

" But rather damp, isn't it ? " he objected.

" We'll spread the plaid," she exclaimed, eagerly snatching it from him, for he had insisted on carrying it after her fall. She unfolded and threw it over the carpet of ferns. She crouched on the extreme right side of it, leaving him the lion's share, so that he should not spoil his beautiful new suit.

" Now we must have something to eat," he said.

" But we, poor church-mice, have nothing ! " she laughed.

" Who told you so ? " he asked, and produced proudly a paper bag from his coat pocket.

It contained a squashed crumbly piece of confectionery. He laid it between them and they spooned the crumbs up to their mouths with their hands. It had a sweet winey flavour, and Lilly identified it at once as punch-tart, for which she had a special weakness.

" The English call it tipsy-cake," he said. " You can get quite screwed on it."

" I don't mind risking it," she answered gleefully.

She threw herself on her back, folding her hands as a cushion behind her head. She lay thus motionless for a few minutes, gazing up at the round patch of sky that gleamed through a parting in the masses of foliage above. Luminous pink flakes of cloud floated in the ocean of ether ; a little further away a blue shimmer broke through the lower sky, like the earnest of another heaven. Lilly stretched up her arms in longing.

"Are you trying to catch larks?" he asked.

"No, not larks, but the falling leaves," she said.

Like maimed birds, they kept dropping from the boughs, fluttering about in spirals when they reached the ground, as if uncertain where to sit.

"Let us see on which of us a leaf falls first," he said, and he too stretched himself on his back.

"The first to get one will have a great piece of good luck," she added.

They both lay still and waited, and then came a leaf floating towards his nose; but he refused to let it settle there, for she deserved the first great piece of luck, so he blew it over to her.

She was too proud to accept such a noble gift from him, and blew it back.

So the game went on. They laughed and threw themselves about after the whirling leaf. Then suddenly, in the heat of combat their lips met, and the next minute their arms were round each other.

The brook babbled on, and the leaves rained down as if nothing had happened. But the earth seemed clothed in a mist of fire, and everywhere rainbow suns glittered.

Why had they done this thing? She sank back, dazed, and noticed that the sky too was on fire. Her comrade sat next her, with his back bent like a schoolboy awaiting a flogging.

"Ah! now we may as well go home," she said despondently.

"Certainly, if the gracious baroness wishes," he replied in mock politeness.

She laughed a tired joyless laugh. Evidently his one desire was to forget what had passed as speedily as possible.

"It doesn't matter now," she said, "whether we call each other by our Christian names or not."

## CHAPTER XXI

**F**EAR, the same unreasoning fear that had taken possession of Lilly during her engagement, consumed her again. It paralysed her spine, bound her arms, and made her knees shake and the veins in her neck throb. It wrapped her brain in a blank impenetrable darkness. But after the first meetings were over and nothing occurred to excite the smallest gleam of suspicion, her fear died down, leaving behind it an ever-ready watchfulness, a tension at all times on the lookout for awkward questions, a warily assumed innocence by which to avoid pitfalls.

Extraordinary to relate, the colonel saw nothing. He who was the most jealous and suspicious of husbands, utterly devoid of illusions, was for once blind. He even swallowed the headache myth, and came to sit on her bed in half-playful, half-cynical sympathy to help *Fräulein von Schwertfeger* change the compresses, which she prepared with over-zealous attentiveness. To submit to this woman's caresses taxed her heavily, for behind them was a furtive pair of eyes that strove to look harmless, yet could not disguise their insatiable curiosity.

As anxiety with regard to her husband gradually lulled itself to sleep, the more wakeful did it become in the case of the self-sacrificing female friend, who at any moment might assume the *role* of a full-fledged enemy and traitor.

Lilly dared not cry till night, when she was alone, and then she would spring out of bed to wash away traces of her tears, only to cry herself to sleep after all.

It was not remorse that she felt, nor shame, nor yearning love, but simply an unfathomable loneliness, a dismayed facing of the question "What next?"

Would it be confession and retirement into a convent, or elopement and suicide?—events which in *Frau Asmussen's*

old novels had been the quite ordinary sequel to such a misdeed.

A week went by. Her headache was well. She had been up again quite a long time, but hadn't seen him. Not a vestige of him was to be seen when, with the doors of her room bolted, she rushed on to the balcony to look across at his quarters.

The colonel kept urging her to resume her rides. The exercise would do her good, and Herr von Prell was ready to escort her.

By the time Saturday came she felt she must give in, for they would be forced to meet the next day at dinner. The horses were stamping before the door. Now the moment of meeting, which she had been anticipating with trembling fears, had come, and confronted her like a new danger. But when she had beheld her friend swagger over the terrace in his high, polished riding-boots, pale and haggard, bowing like a doll on wires to show his hypocritical respect, something in her grew rigid; a feeling came over her that this young man was an utter stranger to whom she was going to speak for the first time.

The next moment they rode out of the gate together. The colonel had gone to the stables, but Fräulein von Schwertfeger stood with clasped hands looking after them.

The road across the fields was like a morass from the standing pools of rain, and squelched under the horses' hoofs. A chill breeze stirred the young autumn wheat. Beyond the ragged twigs of the birches was a faint yellow glow, in which a watery-looking sun was sinking. Everything looked fatigued and sad; even the winter crops seemed to think it had been hardly worth while to sow them.

They trotted on side by side in silence; every minute seemed an hour.

"Surely he must speak at last," she thought, biting her lips till they bled, as she rose in the saddle.

He kept his eyes fixed with an unfaltering gaze on the road, and only moved his right hand now and again to adjust his reins.

"He'll begin again before long with his 'gracious baronesses,'" she thought bitterly, and felt ashamed of herself and him in anticipation.

At length it was she who broke silence.

"Do walk your horse!" she implored, nearly crying.

"Of course we will, comrade," he said, reining in his chestnut.

"Comrade! Comrade!" she echoed derisively, and sought his eyes with a passionate glance. "We've made a nice mess of our comradeship!"

He shrugged his shoulders, the gesture with which he always met a scolding, and did not answer.

"I wish you would say something!" she cried, quite beside herself.

"What do you want me to say?" he asked, making a movement as if he were going to scratch his head reflectively. "It's a nasty affair—we admit that," and he repeated, pondering to himself, "nasty affair, nasty affair!"

"And is that all you have to say?" she exclaimed.

"My gracious friend," he replied, "I am little, and my heart is little in proportion. It's hardly an adequate platform whereon to parade great anguish of soul!"

"Who is talking about anguish of soul!" she cried. "What is to become of us? That is what I want to know."

"Directly I inherit an unencumbered ancestral manor," he replied, with a gesture that denoted invitation, "containing house, stable, horses and carriages, and other animate and inanimate necessities, I shall permit myself the honour of asking your husband for your hand."

She could no longer control her despair.

"If you continue to make your insulting jokes," she almost screamed, bursting into tears, "I'll ride straight away from you now, and break my neck."

"Rather a difficult thing to accomplish on that sober nag of yours," was his cool reply.

She was at a loss what to retort and so let her tears fall silently.

At last he adopted a different tone.

"Be sensible for a change, my child, to please me," he said. "All I meant to do was to clear your soul of superfluous tragedy. As soon as you put a bright face on the matter I'll give it practical consideration; I promise you."

She wiped the tears from her eyes with the gauntlet of her riding-glove and forthwith smiled obediently.

"That's all right," he said with approval. "Not in vain did the poet sing:

'O weine selten, weine schwer.  
Wer Tränen hat, hat auch Malheur.'



Well, now, I'll tell you a fairy tale. We two pretty orphan children were just planted down here in this enchanted castle for each other. We were obliged to come together here, even if long ago we had not been two hearts united somewhere else. The colonel, as a matter of fact, wedded us from the first. The only pity is that your marriage contract with him did not make provision for the circumstances. But there it is, and we have no choice but to resort to some secret arrangement between ourselves. Don't you see, dearest child, we are both tacking the same way on life's ocean. The risks you and I have to run are one and the same. So buck up! and let's go it! We are poor vagabonds, anyhow."

"Thank you, I am not a vagabond!" Lilly flared up. "I have my pride and my honour to maintain, and even if I have sinned, I know how to die for my sins."

"Dying is not so easy" he remarked; "generally the opportunity is lacking, and then when it comes one funks it."

She felt her old burning desire to protect him from his own low estimate of himself.

"You don't mean what you say!" she cried. "You are amongst the boldest and bravest of men, and would face death for the sake of your honour, I know. And if you liked you might have the whole world at your feet. I shall never cease to remind you of that. I have not sacrificed myself for you for nothing. I will interest myself in you till you get back your faith in yourself, till you feel you are once more on the upward path. I will share all your trials and temptations, and stand between you and evil. What am I here for except for your sake—yours?"

At that moment her enthusiasm for him was so great that she could gladly have thrown herself under the hoofs of his horse, and when she compared this with her feelings when they had first met that day, she could hardly comprehend how it was that he had appeared to her in so alienated and repulsive a light.

"You are a most emotional creature," he said; "it is a good thing that the creepers hide your balcony so effectually."

"What do you mean to imply by that?" she faltered, in shocked foreboding.

"And the ladder luckily is still in its place," he went on, "ready to be used. The creepers might break this time and

no one would notice anything amiss, not even the Schwertfeger, eh ? ”

His light eyelashes blinked at her persuasively.

She did not know which way to look, she felt so dreadfully ashamed.

“ Never, never will I have anything to do with you again ! ” she cried. “ I swear by all the saints I never will ! I should loathe myself if I did, and despise you with all my heart and soul ! ” She finished with an exclamation of disgust.

He merely shrugged his shoulders. “ A pity,” he said ; “ it would have been a splendid opportunity . . . ”

He came to dinner the next day the picture of all the virtues in his frock-coat and black cravat. He bowed and scraped, pursed his lips, and was so absurdly deferential that he seemed afraid to take his cup of Mocha coffee from her hand. Fräulein von Schwertfeger’s eyes wandered watchfully and inquiringly from one to the other.

Late that Sunday night, after the colonel had gone into town, and Fräulein von Schwertfeger retired early to her room, Lilly was sitting on her bed brushing her hair in her night attire, when she became aware of a soft rattling sound at the window. It sounded as if a branch were being blown by the autumn wind against the shutters, only that it occurred regularly at intervals, growing weaker and stronger, but always persistent. Seized with fright, she first thought of going down to Fräulein von Schwertfeger. But, recollecting herself in time, she threw on a dressing-gown, and cautiously opened the window and a bit of the outside shutter.

For a moment she saw nothing. It was a starless night, and the bailiff’s house opposite seemed plunged in darkness ; then it dawned on her that something like a rod was oscillating close to the shutter. She opened it a little further—and recognised the pea-shooter !

Then she knew what it was.

Springing backwards she drew the bolt, flung herself into bed, and stopped up her ears with her fingers. But every time she drew them out to listen she heard that persistent regular rattle, which had now become almost an unblushing knock.

The watchman who patrolled yard and park every hour had only to see the ladder leaning against the balcony, and all

would be lost. Anxiety deprived her of her senses. Trembling like an aspen-leaf in every limb, she ran into her dressing-room again, where there was no light, opened the balcony door slowly and noiselessly a finger's depth, and whispered through the crack into the darkness: "Go away at once, and never attempt such a thing again." But when she tried to close the door again it wouldn't shut. She listened, but nothing was to be seen or heard. Then she groped with her hands and found the obstacle. It was the inevitable pea-shooter. She moaned aloud, buried her face, and the next moment was lying half-fainting in his arms.

After this evening she was completely in his power, defenceless, and without a will of her own—a victim of his every wish and whim.

It couldn't be called happiness or even ecstasy. That followed later, when she had overcome her horror of their monstrous conduct and fear of discovery was deadened by nothing happening to disturb them, and she could revel in a defiant sense of security. Then it became a blissful skating over awful abysses—a delirium of the senses full of intangible joys—a beatific offering of herself to a lacerating scourge, an alternative ebullition of self-scorn and degradation and blasphemous prayer.

She began to laugh again—not that old silly childlike laughter which till recently had dominated her frivolous nature. No, it was a mocking exultant laughter, the laughter of a hunted thief when, behind the back of his pursuer, he drags his hard-won booty into a place of safety.

There was a feeling of justification in it too. "I am only doing what my destiny ordains," she would tell herself. "I am coming into the heritage promised me by fate, that the old man has cheated me of for so long."

There was something more that soared over everything, and almost gave a sanctity and purity to this arrant deception, and this was the reflection that their intercourse meant salvation to him. He would learn to despise vulgar and shameful intrigues under the spell of this elevating passion, and on the wings of a woman's redeeming love he would rise into the pure ether where the spirits of great men and heroes dwell.

She drugged her conscience ever anew with these delusions, and when he lay in her arms at their secret rendezvous, gave

expression to them in a whisper, for walls were thin, and it was as well not to speak too loud.

He laughed and kissed the words from her lips, and when she grew uneasy and begged for pledges of constancy, he swore by all his stars to be true.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger's visits to Lilly's room now never lasted later than eleven. At about this hour he was permitted to come; at half-past one he had to be gone. Of course, this was only on nights when the colonel went to town. The train service made it impossible for him to return before two, and, besides, the clatter of approaching carriage wheels could be heard as a warning on the courtyard paving-stones. Before his departure Walter had to smoke a cigarette to clear the room of the odour which he brought with him of stable and leather. For sometimes the colonel, if wine made him talkative, would look in on Lilly as he went to bed, and even come and sit by her for a little, regaling her with the latest "good stories" from Berlin, that he had heard in the Casino. She for her part pretended to be very sleepy, would yawn and purr like a kitten, and often in confidence of safety actually fall asleep in the middle of a laugh.

If only there had been no Fräulein von Schwertfeger! Not that she had noticed anything—the terrors of such a contingency were not to be contemplated. But her restless comings and goings, the almost nervous eagerness with which she spied round her, gave quite enough food for anxiety. She began to look haggard and pale, only the flesh round her mouth, like her sharp-tipped nose, was a deep red. It looked almost as if she drank, but if she did it was in secret, for at table she hardly touched wine.

"I don't mind what she does," thought Lilly, "as long as she doesn't play the spy on me as she did on Käte."

Sometimes it struck Lilly rather forcibly that she herself was now not much better than the poor girl who had been sent away from the castle in disgrace.

## CHAPTER XXII

**F**RÄULEIN VON SCHWERTFEGER had said "Good-night" and gone out of Lilly's room about half an hour before midnight one November evening. The colonel had driven off to the town, and close to Lilly's pillow sat the hero, wet and frozen, for he had been waiting a long time in the drizzling rain below before the signal—a double click of the shutter bolt—had been given to summon him to her side.

Now, however, all was going smoothly. The house slept, the watchmen had gone by, and the ladder, which he for greater safety dragged after him on to the balcony, reposed peacefully in its corner. The blue-shaded lamp bathed the warm, perfumed atmosphere of the room with a midsummer brilliance. Showers of drops dripped softly from the bars of the shutters, and the November wind whimpered in the chimney like a beggar. Lilly lay comfortably stretched beneath the pale blue satin quilt. She held his hand and gazed dreamily up into his face, which even in moments of self-abandonment never quite lost its expression of schoolboy sheepishness. She gazed at the freckled bridge of his nose, the blinking pale-lashed eyes, and the sharply pointed unshaven chin, half hidden in the turned-up collar of his green Norfolk jacket. He dared not brush himself up for her any more, or it would have excited remark from his colleagues.

They did not talk much. It was enough that he was there, he who belonged to her in life and death, with whom she had been cast adrift in this cold, strange world. She drew his head down to hers and stroked the forehead, on which his easy-going career had left no lines. A few rain-drops still hung on his temples.

The clock ticking on the wall drew breath for a gentle chiming of the hour, the hanging lamp swung a little, casting

long wavering shadows on the ceiling, like rocking cradles, or the flapping of ravens' wings. Then there came from the courtyard the sound of the dull rumble of wheels. Whether the sound was advancing or receding was not easy to decide.

Both started and looked at the hands of the clock. Could that possibly be the carriage already, which had gone to fetch the colonel from the station? At twelve? Surely not. The horses were never put in before a quarter to two, or they would have had to wait at the station for an hour and a half. Probably it was the milkman, who had been delayed in bringing back his cans. They grew calm again. A whole long precious hour was before them, an hour of sweet enjoyment and oblivion of everything except each other. To show his relief he made a popping sound with his mouth. She stretched out her arms and lifted herself up to his level with a contented smile. At that very moment there were three short peremptory raps on the door opening into the corridor. Fräulein von Schwertfeger's voice called out, "Open the door, Lilly; open the door immediately."

Walter bounded up. Before she could look round he had glided out of the room. She felt as if bells were pealing in her ears, and a vague longing to sink through the bed before the knock was repeated and drew her to the door to turn the key. Overcome with shame, she had hardly time to bury herself under the quilt again before Fräulein von Schwertfeger's eyes took a hasty survey of the room and alighted on something grey and round in a corner. She darted at it, and only later did Lilly recognise that it was Walter's cap. She drew back the bolt of the door into the colonel's room, and then with apparent calm, as if nothing had happened, seated herself on the edge of Lilly's bed.

"Whatever you do, don't cry," she whispered hurriedly, and then the colonel's footsteps were heard in the corridor.

"Good gracious, is it so late? How time flies when two women get gossiping!" was the speech Fräulein von Schwertfeger greeted him with. Her tone expressed the most unbounded surprise.

There he stood, and appeared not altogether pleased at not finding his young wife alone.

"Where do you spring from all at once, colonel? You

can't have ordered a special train, and if you came through the air, I never knew before you had mastered the art of flying; and I am sure your wife didn't—did you, my pet? You see, she is rendered speechless with astonishment."

Thus she talked on, giving Lilly a few moments in which to collect herself.

Forced to render account of his movements, he said that as he drove to the station he had remembered that it was a neighbouring squire's birthday, and, changing his plans on the spot, had turned round and gone to help in the celebration of the happy event instead of going to town.

"That is always the way," said Fräulein von Schwertfeger; "the most extraordinary events have the simplest explanations. Good-night, dearest. I hope you will sleep well, and wake up without headache."

The colonel was on the alert. "Why, if she had a headache, didn't you leave her to go to sleep long ago?" he asked.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger was equal to the occasion, and without hesitating a moment she replied:

"Lilly asked me to get her compresses again, but I thought it wiser just to lay a cool hand on her forehead. Now I think we ought to leave her alone, don't you, colonel? Good-night!"

Thereupon she extinguished the blue lamp.

Lilly felt she must scream out: "Don't go! stay here, or he'll strangle me!"

She was already out of the room, and so effectual had her diplomacy been, that the colonel, with a few civilities about her headache, retired to his own room without further questions. Otherwise a breakdown of Lilly's nerves might have brought things to the inevitable crisis there and then.

Paralysed with a dull fear she lay listening, first in the direction of the colonel's room, then of that where the wind moaned, and where there was an almost inaudible rustling of the leaves, caused by the ladder which Walter was sliding over the railings of the balcony. As long as there was light in the room he discreetly remained where he was. She could hear afterwards how he removed the ladder and put it in the old place. Not till now, when she knew they were safe, did she realise with a shudder the gravity of their escape, and she felt an inclination to call out and cry for mercy.

Anna's conduct seemed inexplicable. Why had she made

herself a party to their misdeeds, she whose reputation, existence, and employment were at stake? Did a wretched sinner like herself deserve such a sacrifice?

Her heart went out to her in gratitude. She could no longer rest quietly in bed. She must at once go and thank her.

Noiselessly she threw something on, and taking the precaution to bolt the door of communication between the two rooms, she slipped out into the corridor, having assured herself that the colonel was already asleep.

The old oak staircase creaked terribly, but it often did this when no one was creeping down it; its music resounded through the house at intervals all the night through. From under Fräulein von Schwertfeger's door came the glimmer of light. Heavy footsteps paced up and down restlessly. At last she ventured to knock, and was answered by "Who's there?"

"It's Lilly. . . . Anna!"

"What do you want? Go back to bed!"

"No, no, Anna! I must speak to you; I must."

The door opened. "Come in, then," was the not very cordial invitation.

Lilly was going to throw herself on her neck, but Fräulein von Schwertfeger shook her off.

"I am in no mood for disturbing scenes," she said in her trumpet voice, which she tried in vain to muffle. It had lost every vestige of its sympathetic tone. "You needn't thank me; I haven't acted as I have done for your sake."

Lilly felt very small, and very like a scolded child. Since the days when she had accepted meekly Frau Asmussen's chastisements she had not been so snubbed.

"At first you help me . . . " she hesitated, "and then . . . "

"As you are here, you shall answer a few questions," said Anna. "Fasten up your dress—it is cold here—and sit down."

Lilly obediently did what she was told.

"To begin with, have I ever done anything to bring about a meeting between you and that young man?"

"No; when could you?"

"That's just what I am asking."

"It was quite the contrary, for you wouldn't even consent at first to my having the riding lessons."



"And when I did consent, have I allowed them to take place without supervision?"

"Without supervision?" echoed Lilly. "No, I should think not, indeed. You were nearly always there from start to finish."

"Was it I who proposed your riding about the open country with him alone?"

"You? Why, of course not. The first time we went without leave, and afterwards it was the colonel who wished it."

"Lastly, have I or have I not taken care to watch that everything was right in your room?"

"I am not sure, but I think so. You used, anyhow, to come in the last thing to say 'Good-night.'"

"Have you taken me for your enemy—your jailer?"

"Not exactly . . . but I thought you didn't really care much about me."

Anna laughed a hard, cheerless laugh.

"Your utterances are very valuable," she said. "It proves to me that I haven't blundered in carrying through my scheme, and that I have nothing to reproach myself with."

"What scheme?" asked Lilly, quite at sea.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger measured her with a glance of pitying scorn.

"I knew everything, child, from the very beginning. The first moment you met him here I saw what was coming. I could reckon it all up as I do the cost of dinner. I just let things go as they were bound to go. I could do it without lowering myself in my own self-esteem. Besides, what end would have been served by interfering? You were simply bent on rushing headlong to your ruin."

"What have I ever done," faltered Lilly, "that you should hate me so? I have never tried to upset your position in the house. I submitted to you from the first moment I arrived. I put myself entirely in your hands and now you treat me like this!"

"My dear, if I had hated you," replied Fräulein von Schwertfeger, "you would not be here now. You would probably at this very minute be wandering on the high-road. A dozen times or more I might have crushed you like dust in the palm of my hand, and I haven't done it. But I'll be honest. . . . Yes, I did hate you—that is to say, before I knew you. I pictured

you a little pert, designing minx, who had drawn the colonel on, out of mercenary motives, to resort to that extreme measure which is the last resource of old libertines when they are thwarted. But when you came and I saw what you were, a dear, ingenuous child, without suspicion of evil, full of good intentions towards him and myself, I had to pocket my hate. Then you became to me nothing more than a harmless little pet dog that one uses so long as it is any pleasure to one and then kicks aside. I have done with you, my dear child, long ago. You're not in it. I and the colonel alone are playing the game. I have to reckon with him now, and then my work is over."

Lilly's soul was full of a dull sickening wonder. She felt as if doors were being thrown open and blinds drawn up, and she was looking straight into human hearts as into a fiery abyss.

"I thought that you and he were so much to each other," she said. "I thought——" Then suddenly it occurred to her that her first-idea had been the right one. This imperious and hardened old maid, of whose beauty there were still traces, had ten or fifteen years ago been admired by her employer, after a time neglected, and now wished to be revenged.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger guessed her thoughts and speedily dispelled the delusion.

"If that had been it," she said, "I should have known how to keep silent, and have regarded the castle as my sanctuary had I been allowed to remain in it. No, no, my child; things are not always so simple in this world, and there are worse hells than you dream of."

Then Lilly heard a story which filled her with horror and pity, the story of which she was the last chapter.

The colonel, always a man of tyrannical will, with a mad infatuation for young girls, had, under the pretext that when he was at home on leave he liked to have youth and gaiety about him, advertised for pupils to learn housekeeping. He selected the successful applicants himself, having known beforehand whom they were to be. For a long time Fräulein von Schwertfeger suspected nothing, till the servants began to talk. They came to her with stories of secret orgies at the top of the house, of wild races up and down stairs after frightened girls clothed in silver spangles—transparent garments of silver being apparently an old weakness of the colonel's. Her eyes

were fully opened to these disgraceful goings-on when one of the girls attempted suicide, and she left the house. But she was poor and used to ruling. She could not keep subordinate posts, and sank into poverty and wretchedness. The colonel did not lose sight of her, and when he thought she had suffered sufficient punishment for her independent line of action, he asked her to return once more to the castle as his lady-housekeeper. He promised her that there would be nothing more to complain of, so she crept back to his house like a starved dog. He soon broke his word, however; the orgies were resumed, but she hadn't any longer the courage to protest. She learnt to be blind and deaf when amorous glances were exchanged at table, and late at night shrill cries and laughter reached her bedroom. She even went so far as to keep the scandal from the curious servants, and thus to screen the house's reputation, while she offered his girl friends a motherly interest and affection.

"I shouldn't be surprised," she added, "if he hadn't made you the same proposals, and suggested that I should look after you."

And it came back to Lilly's remembrance how in that hour of fate, when she had become engaged to him, he had walked round her, eager but irresolute, and spoken of a worthy and distinguished lady under whose fostering care she was to develop on his estate into a woman of the world.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger had not done. She went on to say that the bitter consciousness of her shameful position ate into her soul like a canker, and finally took such possession of her that her one thought was to be revenged. His marriage was to be the instrument. She would continue to be blind and deaf as he had once demanded she should be. That was all. Matters should take their natural course. Such had been the state of affairs till to-day. To-day the catastrophe must have been unavoidable, and would have fallen on the colonel if at the last decisive moment her strength of character had not failed her. She found that the young, good-hearted, guilelessly guilty wife had won her affection too deeply to be sacrificed to her plans of vengeance.

"But I thought you said just now," Lilly ventured to interpose, "that you had not done it for my sake."

Fräulein von Schwertfeger fixed her with a stony and awful stare.

"My child," she answered, "if you were not quite such a stupid young thing, whom sin alone can mature, you might understand the conflict that is perpetually going on in anyone like myself. For the present, be satisfied that you are out of danger."

In a burst of gratitude Lilly flew at Fräulein von Schwertfeger and kissed her face and hands. Anna no longer repulsed her; she caressed her hair and talked to her in a tone of friendly patronage. Then Lilly, crouching at her feet, confessed how the affair with Walter had arisen, how their friendship had originated, and how he in reality had been the author of her happiness.

"Happiness!" echoed Fräulein von Schwertfeger, and she made a sound through her tight lips like a whistle of disdain.

Lilly stopped short, looked at her inquiringly, and then understood. The question burned in her brain, "Am I any better, really, than if he had dragged me here as his mistress?"

It was eleven months since that night of courtship. What had they made of her? She threw her arms round Fräulein von Schwertfeger's neck and cried, cried, cried. It did her such a lot of good to have a sisterly, or rather a motherly, bosom on which to pillow her head. It reminded her of the days which had ended with the flourish of a knife.

Of course, now it was all over; that was an understood thing. They must not meet again—not once. Fräulein von Schwertfeger demanded it, and Lilly without opposition agreed.

"If only it weren't for my mission!" she sighed.

"What mission?" asked Anna.

Then Lilly told her that too—of her sacred responsibility with regard to his life, of the influence her love had upon him, awaking him to higher and purer things, and how she would be answerable with the last drop of blood in her veins for his ascent to a noble plane of endeavour, where his work, inspired by her, would bear fruit and not be wasted.

It was Fräulein von Schwertfeger's turn to be astounded, and she listened to her with distended, incredulous eyes, paced the room excitedly, and murmured to herself, "It's unbelievable! unbelievable!" And when Lilly asked her what was unbelievable, she kissed her on the forehead and said, "You poor, poor thing!"

"Why poor?" asked Lilly.

" Because you are bound to suffer in this life."

Hereupon it was settled that Anna would speak to him once more herself, and, as the price of her silence, require from him the breaking off of every sort of relation between them. Not even the rides would be permitted. Lilly pleaded for the writing of one single letter of farewell. That, she thought, she owed him in order that he should not be cast into despair about her and his future.

Then they separated. Lilly ran upstairs ; elated, redeemed, borne on the wings of new hopes, she cast all precautions to the winds, but, thank God, the colonel was still snoring.

The clocks struck four, and the clodhopping step of the stable-boy was already heard in the yard. Before she flung herself into bed she allowed herself one farewell look across at the bailiff's lodge and rejoiced that renunciation was so easy.

## CHAPTER XXIII

“ **D**EAREST HERR VON PRELL,

“ You will have concluded from what has happened that all must be over between us. Yes, everything has come to an end. We shall never meet again except at table. If you ask whether this makes me sad I will be brave and say ‘No,’ in the hope that it will cause you to feel our parting less. But the question is not whether we find it difficult or easy. We have to consider whether our feelings in the matter are elevating and humanly disinterested. True self-sacrifice must be the keystone of our lives. Yes, I expect from you the nobility of renunciation. The whole of our future must be dedicated to memories alone. Are we ever likely to enjoy again such exquisite hours as we have spent together? I have done with thoughts of happiness, and so must you too. Henceforth my one sacred duty will be my husband’s welfare, and I must request you to devote all the energy you are capable of to the reordering of your life. You know life is a very sacred thing. I feel that it is so, since I have had a kind woman friend to set me on the right road, and I want you to feel it too.

“ This letter is my last. You may write to me just once. Please do, and put your answer in the pea-shooter, which still stands as before in the corner of the balcony. Ah! indeed, I shall have no peace till I know that our souls are united by the same desires. Good-bye, and when you come to meals, be sure you make no secret reference to what has been. It would only be painful to me, and I should doubt your good faith.

“ Always yours in true sisterly affection,

“ L. v. M.”

" GRACIOUS FRIEND AND LADY,

" The profound emotions I have experienced since my last interview with our honoured Fräulein von Schwertfeger are only deepened by your most kind lines. I feel a great impulse to perform deeds of atonement never yet attempted. I am ready to heap scorn and contumely on the seven deadly sins. I will take as example all the paragons of virtue the world has ever known, and will try to find in the lofty renunciation you demand of me that undiluted happiness which is the only kind devoid of the sting of remorse—an advantage which cannot have much weight with one so fatally constituted that he has heard of such a thing but never felt it.

" Thus, dearest and most charming of women, farewell ! We certainly had a good time. I can swear to this without committing perjury. Should you require more pledges for the future, I can also swear, first, to abhor alcohol ; second, to shun the fair sex like the plague ; third, to devote to the Encyclopædia of Agriculture unremitting love and attention, two volumes of seven hundred and twenty pages each notwithstanding.

" Once more, farewell ! The ladder of my hopes, which I have climbed for the last time, shall find a wintry grave under fir cones and branches. When the times comes, may it rise therefrom to greet a new spring.

" Till then, I kiss in all constancy your slim and refreshingly large hand.

" Yours,

" Already reformed,

" WALTER VON PRELL."

Lilly found this letter, on the morning but one after the foregoing events, stuffed in the mouth of the pea-shooter, which reposed innocently against the balcony glass doors. It cannot be said that it gave her unlimited satisfaction. There were expressions in it that raised scepticism with regard to the sincerity of his conversion. Yet his assurances of amendment were so frank and concise, one could not doubt that the sentiment that prompted him to make them was genuine. It was only that he could not give up the incorrigible levity with which he expressed himself. Those who loved him must tolerate this eccentricity, whether they liked it or not.

She kissed the letter and put it inside her blouse, that it might rest there comfortably for a little while before being torn up.

In the afternoon she went for a stroll round the castle, and found under the balcony a heap of fir-branches freshly gathered, out of which a rung or two of the buried ladder greeted her confidentially. Pleased at this tender evidence of his pain at parting from her, she ran on to the boggy outskirts of the park, and marvelled every now and then at the easiness of renunciation.

Yet it proved not so easy after all. She began to discover this during the next few days of reaction, when life seemed hollow and barren of excitement, when the sad grey autumn hours passed drearily and evening came, followed by morning, apparently without rhyme or reason.

She did not find in Anna von Schwertfeger's society the solace and support she had hoped for. Although her friend did not withdraw her promises, she remained behind a wall of reserve, which made any close and loving intimacy out of the question. It almost seemed as if she was afraid of being implicated in the sinner's guilt, if she encouraged Lilly's advances.

At this time Lilly had to put up with a great deal from the colonel. His outbursts of ungovernable fury now fell on her, as on the rest of the household. But what she dreaded more was the gloomy, threatening glance he fixed on her at moments when she sat indulging in quiet introspection; she felt instinctively that something was in his mind that boded her no good. She began even to fear that he had got wind of her affair with Prell. But Fräulein von Schwertfeger would not hear of such a thing.

"If that were so," she said, "he would adopt a rather different procedure. Broken chairs and smashed lamps would be the consequence of his first-awakened suspicion. I think the matter stands thus: he is bored to extinction at home, he is hankering for the regiment, and he holds you, child, responsible for the change in his manner of living. God forbid that he gets to hate you for it, otherwise, as far as I can see, you will have no choice but to get a separation—or commit suicide."

All this was not very consoling. No less discouraging was his persistent refusal to introduce her to his neighbours.



Anna assured him Lilly's education was long ago complete, and no colonel's dame could find anything amiss in her manners. Yet he looked at her in distrust, and put off the visits week after week.

Nevertheless, Lilly cheerfully endured her troubles. Belief in herself and in him buoyed her up, and gave her strength and composure. She made herself out a time-table, so that every hour of the day should be occupied. She learnt Goethe's lyrics by heart, she read Shakespeare in English, pored over Art books and studied the labyrinthine history of the French Revolution. Especially attractive reading did she find in a big geographical tome containing illustrations of Southern harbours and tropical forests, rocky mountains, and the like. Italy, too, was represented. There were pious pilgrims praying at shrines, mystic churches and buildings, slender pillared porticos, and all filled her with the old hunger to wander under those sunny skies.

And so she lost her way travelling in spirit in foreign countries, to look round suddenly and find herself face to face with a fair young man with freckles in a black and white check suit stiffly bowing and saying, "as gracious baroness commands." Then tears sprang to her eyes. Her only distraction now was to stand at the balcony door, and over the rampart of Virginian creeper, the last leaves of which fluttered about like red flags, to gaze across at the outside of the bailiff's house. Of course, he had no idea she was there. Oh, how proud she felt of him! For she saw him spending all his spare hours with the *Encyclopædia of Agriculture* on the window ledge. Quickly she caught up her geographical work again, fired by his example not to idle.

In the evening he closed the shutters early, and drew the heavy curtains, which he had put up in his wild days, so close that not a crack of light glimmered through. But Lilly hadn't the smallest doubt that the lamp went on burning far into the night, and that he sat over his books copying memorable passages, and revelling in great creative ideas. And she revelled with him, for now she knew he could not fall. She had his word, and he her honour in his keeping. This must be his talisman leading him on to a higher life. So the weeks went on.

He excused himself from appearing on Sundays, and she was grateful to him. Another thing she congratulated herself

on was that in that fatal night she had caught a cold, which the doctor said was severe enough to prevent her rides for the rest of the winter. Probably Fräulein von Schwertfeger had a hand in this too.

One morning early in December it happened that the colonel varied his ordinary confirmed grumpiness and appeared at table in excellent spirits. He chuckled to himself, looked into vacancy with eyes that twinkled, and seemed to be shaking inwardly with suppressed laughter.

Lilly ventured to inquire what was the cause. At first he declined to tell her. "Rubbish! Mind your own business," he said, but finally he could not keep the news to himself.

"Now, would you believe it?" he began. "I was warned lately at the Casino to keep an eye on my young Prell. It turns out from all accounts that he has been haunting low quarters at night, and has distinguished himself in a brawl about some little baggage of a barmaid."

Lilly felt a freezing sensation rise from her feet and slowly creep up her spine. Her limbs became numb. She smiled, and the smile cut into her cheeks like the sharp corners of a stone.

"At first I laughed at them," he went on, "for, in the only train that goes out and comes in of an evening, I have been a passenger myself, as you know, every day. No horse could stand twenty miles each way for long. And the pocket-money I give him wouldn't pay for a special train. So I told our major. But he stuck to his story, and said he had heard it from the younger men, and that it would be a pity if the boy was stripped of his uniform. When I got to the station at one, it struck me that I had time to search the train from end to end, which I did—fourth class and all. Not a sign of him, of course. I did the same the next night and the next, and went on doing it till I was sick, even calling up the inspector to ask if he could give me a clue. He couldn't, he called out from inside, half asleep. So I began to think the whole thing a swindle. Now, just listen to this: yesterday evening when I got to the station here and was already in the carriage, I remembered that I had forgotten my umbrella, an appendage to which I can never get accustomed. So I went back for it. The station was quite empty, but the train was still standing there; and just as I passed the luggage van, which

had its doors wide open, I saw someone jump out on the line on the other side. I shouted 'Stop!' but he bolted off into the woods. It flashed into my mind that it was Prell. I told Heinrich to drive like the devil, and in less than ten minutes we were here. Then I reflected he must have heard the sound of wheels from the footpath, and I went straight to my room and turned on the lights. I wanted him to think I was there. Did I disturb you, Lilly? By Jove, Lilly!" and he started, "I never saw such a face!"

"What's the matter with it?" she asked, faintly smiling again.

"She hasn't been well all day," interposed Anna hurriedly. "Your story too, colonel, is rather exciting. I am quite wound up."

"Humph!" he ejaculated, twisting his dyed moustache, and he seemed unwilling to take up the thread of his tale again. But Lilly could not maintain her composure.

"I must know the rest, I must!" she cried, clasping her hands imploringly, quite beside herself.

"Very well," said the colonel, fixing his eyes on her. "I went down again quickly and stood in ambush before the bailiff's house. Two minutes—and my gentleman comes along, slouching like a pole-cat, stands still, looks up and eyes my room, sees the light, and thinks, 'Ha, ha! it's all right.' Then just as he puts his latchkey in the door, I collar him."

Lilly burst into a fit of wild laughter. "Oh, how funny! How very funny!" she exclaimed, and this time the colonel believed her.

"Yes; but something funnier is coming," he continued. "I said to him, 'If you confess the whole truth, I'll forgive you; if not, you'll go packing to-morrow early.' And then it came out—what do you think the rascal has been up to? Carrying on with the barmaid at the *Golden Apple*, if you please—the resort of non-commissioned officers and clerks. So that he might loaf there at his ease, he bribed the porters, and actually went and came back in the same train with me evening after evening concealed in the luggage van. If that isn't impudence, I don't know what is—eh, Lilly?"

There was a pause. She felt herself tossing on a stormy sea, a boiling and singing in her ears, and felt at the same moment Anna's hand closing on hers under the table, in warning pressure.

"Yes, it certainly is very funny," she said.

The tone in which she spoke was not convincing, for another pause ensued.

Then the colonel rose, took her head between his hands, pressing it so hard she thought her ears would split, and said :  
"You certainly appear in need of rest."

With this he turned on his heel and went out of the dining-room.

"Now pull yourself together, dear," Lilly heard her friend's voice urging her, "because after this he'll be on the *qui vive*."

Lilly was going to throw herself on Fräulein von Schwertfeger's bosom, hoping to be petted and consoled, but she held herself aloof, as if she feared being caught in too intimate converse with Lilly, and said in a tone of strained friendliness :

"Excuse me, Lilly dear. There is something I must attend to at once," and she too left the room.

"What now?" she thought.

She looked about her. The remains of their abruptly finished meal were still on the table. The dark oak furniture cast shining black shadows into the wintry half-light of the room. The old brass chandeliers gleamed dully. All was as it always was, and yet there was nothing there—only a cruel, all-devouring void, an abyss which lured her into its depths as if drawing her with hooks and pulleys.

She went to the window, and looked out apathetically. The bare branches shook in the wind, the ivy on the railing swayed; even the bent rose-trees, the shoots of which the old gardener had protected with straw, moved quiveringly backwards and forwards. All of them writhed in the grip of winter, and only the fallen leaves lying in heaps on the thin coating of snow were still, but they were dead eternally.

What was to be done now?

If this could happen, then all was in vain. There was no hope, no rising to loftier heights, no more strength of purpose, and no more truth. You might as well throw yourself down on the ground beside the dead leaves and die.

She heard the clatter of plates behind her. The maid-servant, as no one had rung, had come unsummoned with old Ferdinand to clear the table. She thought of Käte and of that other creature, in whose arms he had made a mock of her and of her faith in him. She dragged her lifeless legs upstairs to the

only room in the house where she ever felt at home. As she passed she heard the colonel raving in his bedroom, and almost running as he paced up and down.

"Let him rave!" she thought indifferently.

Next she heard him give orders from behind the closed door for the carriage to come round.

"He may stay or go, for all I care," she thought.

She stepped on to the balcony. The icy-cold sensation that still stiffened her neck crept down her arms to her finger tips.

Over there sat Walter, employing his leisure as usual in deep study of the great Encyclopædia of Agriculture. He lifted his hand every now and then wearily to his brow and knocked the ash from his cigarette against a flower-pot without looking up. He hadn't time to look up. Good God!

Confronted by this abominable farce, enacted solely with the object of deceiving her, Lilly was seized with such mad, accusing fury that she was rendered almost senseless. A pricking and stinging ran through her benumbed arms. Then an excruciating burning fever throbbed painfully in her temples and hung a blood-red curtain before her eyes.

She saw nothing more, heard nothing more.

She rushed down the stairs, tore back the bolt of the garden door, sprang down the terrace steps, and flew like mad across the lawn to the bailiff's lodge.

What did she care whether anyone saw her or not? At this moment she minded nothing. She didn't so much as knock at his door, but opened it with a vigour that sent it swinging against the wall. A hateful, pungent smell like the interior of a menagerie greeted her nostrils. He was still at the window, and bounded up when he saw her.

The grey daylight shone on the top of his head.

"He's got his hair cut like a clothes-brush again," she thought. "The fast life he's now leading requires that it should be so. He must look a swell."

"Lord in heaven!" he said, crumbling his lighted cigarette between his fingers. "This is a pretty rumpus."

"Why—why have you——?" she shrieked incoherently. "Oh, you blackguard! you dishonourable scoundrel!"

"Damn it!" he said, looking round him in despair, "I don't see how the gracious baroness is to get out of this without compromising herself."

"I don't care! You have broken your word; you have

thrown away what was sacred between us—thrown it to a low barmaid . . . a barmaid, a person who would hang round the neck of any man who gave her twopence . . . You are a miserable wretch, not worth trying to save . . . You won't be saved . . . You insist on going to the dogs as fast as you can . . . ”

“That's all well and good,” he said, “and you may be stating very deplorable and indisputable facts; but what I should like to know, dear baroness, is how you mean to save yourself?”

“I am absolutely indifferent with regard to myself!” she exclaimed. “I have come here to have it out with you . . . I demand an explanation here—now—instantly—on the spot.”

“With pleasure, gracious baroness,” he answered, “but first, for God's sake, move away from the window.”

Whereupon he cast a swift, keen, nervous glance across at the windows of the castle, which so far looked unsuspecting enough.

Shocked by his rudeness, she fled into the interior of the apartment. It was low-ceilinged, dark, and badly furnished, like a labourer's dwelling. The obnoxious doggy odour was here more strongly apparent. Where it came from was a mystery revealed a moment later, when, as she approached the wall at the back of the room, something snapped viciously at her foot, and two little circlets of fire gleamed angrily in the dusk.

“Behave yourself, Tommy,” he commanded as she drew back with a cry.

So it was Tommy, the third party to the Triple Alliance!

She leaned against the back of the old spindle-legged sofa. Its worn springs creaked and its bristly horsehair pricked her hands. The thought shot through her brain: “What am I doing here? How does it concern me?”

He glided meanwhile, listening hard, from door to door.

“If old Leichtweg happened to be in the next room,” he said, “there'd be the devil to pay. But if you go away at once by the front entrance into the yard, it might be supposed you only came to ask a question, and we may still save the situation.”

She saw in this proposed move nothing but a crafty attempt at evasion, and a fresh volume of wrath overwhelmed her.

“I shall not go,” she said, “till I hear what you've got to

say for yourself ; " and to give force to her resolve, she sank on to the creaking sofa, which was covered by a dirty, odorous grey horsecloth, folded several times to protect whoever sat down or lay on it from the projecting springs.

He was forced to yield. " Well, then, look here. A man is, so to speak, a man, isn't he ? And when he is given up in a beastly mean sort of way he——"

" Mean way ! " Lilly faltered. " What was there mean in my letter ? Didn't I pour out my whole heart in it, and didn't dear Schwertfeger—— ? "

She could not go on, she was so choked with scorn and anger.

In the meantime he had arrived at the right policy to pursue, after being completely nonplussed at first.

" That's just it," he said, growing more offended every moment. " Can it be supposed that a love affair like ours was to close with a lukewarm moral sermon ? . . . and from that Schwertfeger woman too ? Did I deserve it of you, to be dismissed through a third person—that shabby, hideous old thing too ? Wasn't it enough to drive a fellow desperate . . . after all I have done for you ? "

" Done for me ? " echoed Lilly. " What have you done for me, pray ? "

" Well, wasn't I always ready to be your self-sacrificing comrade ? Haven't I even sacrificed my loyalty to my old colonel for your sake—the man I honoured and revered, who you may say picked me out of the gutter ? That's no trifle, I can assure you. Do you imagine it didn't go against the grain ? Do you imagine I didn't get awfully depressed ? And then night after night to have nothing to do but fool round with a dog that stinks ; for that beast Tommy does, you know. Can a man be blamed in the circumstance for trying to deaden his feelings, to still the qualms of his love-anguish ? How you can expect that I shouldn't entirely amaze me. We speak different languages, my child, a yawning chasm divides our two natures. You actually don't mind risking both our lives for the sake of a petty grievance. I don't belong, as a rule, to the pruders ; but the devil knows what I wouldn't give to get you out of this room."

During this lengthy oration he had walked round Lilly with one hand in the belt of his shooting-jacket, his short, jerky steps expressing his indignant consternation.

She for her part sat rigidly erect, turning her head, with

great despairing eyes, towards him mechanically, first to the right, and then to the left.

When he had finished he took a new cigarette from a case and energetically brushed off the superfluous tobacco with his forefinger.

She rose to her full height, leaving the sofa and sofa-table a long way below her.

"Listen, Walter," she said; "from this moment all is at an end between us."

"Wasn't it so long ago?" he asked.

"I mean inwardly too," she explained.

"Oh, indeed . . . inwardly!" He made a grimace. "That means, I suppose, in your case, when you are sick and tired of one."

When she saw her love so vulgarly derided and jeered at, her self-restraint completely collapsed. With a loud moan she ran behind the sofa and hid her face in the wall.

"Don't go near the window," she heard him hiss, as he ground his teeth.

But what did she care about the window?

In his distraught anxiety he took to pleading.

"Do come away from the window," he entreated. "I was only rotting. I wanted to make you laugh again; nothing else, I swear. Please come away from the window."

She did not stir. She wanted to crawl into something—crawl away with her shame.

Then she felt herself roughly seized by his hands.

So it had come to that, too! She was to be beaten by him!

She struck at him, wrestled with him, dug her fingers into his throat, and then suddenly. . . A whizzing, clashing, and clattering, and splinters of glass flew over their heads; and an oblong, dark, slender thing glanced by them, like the shaft of a lance, hit something, rebounded, and lay at their feet.

At the same time she felt a gust of wind blow on her forehead and awaken her from the stupefaction of the moment.

One of the upper window-panes was shattered to atoms. But no sign of a living person was to be seen. Only the balcony door, which a minute or two had been shut, stood open, showing blackness within as it swung to.

"A near shave, by Jove!" said Walter, and stooped to pick up the mysterious weapon, the splintered panes of glass crashing beneath his feet.



"The pea-shooter!" faltered Lilly.

Yes, it was the pea-shooter that a quarter of an hour ago had stood on her balcony.

"It's a good job he hadn't his gun at hand," said Walter. "or we should be riddled now like sieves."

He wiped the anxious sweat that beaded his brow away with the back of his hand.

For all that he was a plucky little chap, and knew exactly what to do. He sprang to the wardrobe under which the foxy dog roosted, got out his military revolver, drew back the trigger, and tested the barrels.

Then he said: "Now, oblige me by going into Leichtweg's room. Bolt yourself in. He's simply gone to load, and then he'll be here."

But Lilly wouldn't. Her anger against him had completely evaporated.

"Let me stay with you. Please let me stay."

"It won't do, child," he said, wrinkling his forehead into the old masterful folds. "What is to follow now is man's business."

"Then I shall stay in the passage, and receive him at your door."

He gnawed his moustache. "Well, if you will take it like that, I can't reason with you," he said. "Please be seated."

He took the key from the outside of the door, put it in the lock on the inside and cautiously turned it several times.

"There's a vast difference between loading and shooting," he said, "the devil only knows."

Hereupon he drew out his watch, and listening attentively to every sound outside, he counted: one, one and a half—two minutes.

"It looks as if he couldn't find his cartridges," he said; and then, with a commanding air, he added, "Sit down; you will need your legs later."

She sank into one corner of the sofa and he took the other. He laid the watch between them on the bumpy seat. Both counted now with their eyes fixed on the minute-hand. "Two and a half—three, three and a half—four, four and a half—five minutes."

Nothing was to be heard but the wind whistling through the branches. Then it seemed as if they could hear horses'

hoofs in the courtyard and a trotting away on the other side of the gates.

"Whom can he be going to fetch?" asked Walter. "It hasn't come to seconds yet."

Lilly saw red suns dancing before her eyes. The ceiling of the room began to descend on her.

And Walter went on counting: "Seven—eight, eight and a half." Still nothing. "Nine, nine and a half—ten——" Then he suddenly uttered a low whistling sound and seized his revolver.

The front door grated on its hinges, steps drew near, but not the threatening thunder of an outraged husband's, bent on revenge; these crept softly, catlike, hesitatingly onwards.

Then for a while silence again, only broken by the breathing of two anxious beings, and of someone else's breathing on the other side of the door.

"Who is there?" called out Walter.

Next came a tap, low, broken, unassertive, as if made by fingers that trembled and failed.

"Who the devil is there?" he shouted again.

"Anna von Schwertfeger."

He jumped up and opened the door.

There she stood, ashen-grey, and only red about the mouth and eyelids.

"The colonel has just driven to Baron von Platow's, and will be back in three hours. He has bidden me tell you, Lilly, that when he returns he does not wish to find you in his house or on his estate."

"And what has he bidden you tell me?" sneered Walter von Prell.

Fräulein von Schwertfeger, without heeding him, took Lilly's hand.

"Come," she said, "there's not much time. We must begin packing at once."

"Yes, but where am I to go?" she asked helplessly as she slowly rose to her feet.

Directly they were outside she saw the carriage that was to take her to the station drive up.



## PART II



## CHAPTER I

**S**HE was Lilly Czepanek once more. The divorce suit had been quickly settled. There had been no attempt at defence, and after the colonel's evidence the judges decreed that Lilly had forfeited the right for ever to bear her husband's honourable name.

"There is nothing to rescue from this wreck," wrote Doktor Pieper, "except the jewels which I hope, acting on my advice about looking in at shop-windows, you have industriously accumulated. The pearls which your ex-husband—prompted, I may confess now, by me—put round your neck on the wedding day I will get permission for you to retain, and they alone will keep your head above water for many a long day."

In consequence of this letter, Lilly, who after her flight had found the pearls in one of her trunks among her gala dresses and rare lace, took them to a jeweller's to be carefully packed, and returned them then and there, addressed to Fräulein von Schwertfeger.

The less valuable ornaments she kept, feeling that they might justly be considered her personal property. She had disposed of a good many to start with, and what remained would scarcely keep her for another year. After that she would be destitute. But she did not think of the future. It was hidden from her behind the veil of tears that she had shed. Regret for what she had lost, acute consciousness of her grievous position, occupied her mind to the exclusion of almost everything else.

Oh, how she cried and cried—she understood now what crying meant. She learnt to gulp down her tears as one gulps down seawater; she sucked them back with her lower lip, she shook them off her cheeks as if they were raindrops; but always they gushed forth afresh. After the pain that caused

them was deadened they still welled up, from habit. Whether she was asleep or awake, her tears came.

Trembling and stunned, without defending herself, without complaints or reproaches, she had driven away that grey, gusty December evening between the hour of vespers and nightfall. Away, it did not matter where, only away as quickly as possible.

She landed in Berlin, the harbour for all wastrels and wrecks. In that world where oblivion lays its hands in blessing on the heads of righteous and unrighteous alike; where eternal hopes illumine drab days of depression like firework sparks; where grief for the past is soon changed into an eager expectation of coming happiness; where the great god, Luck, holds sway as lord and master—in that world of the unknown and stranded, where only those who are old and poor together sink hopelessly, into that world crept Lilly on her hands and knees. She stayed in pensions for many a dreary month, frequented by guilty *divorcées* who congregate together in such places like apples rotting in heaps, by Chilian attachés and agents of mysterious businesses in Bucharest and Alexandria, who gave a tone to the roof they sojourned under. As inoffensively as she could she avoided the confidences of companions in tribulation, who wished to console her, and kept at bay the advances of olive-complexioned neighbours at table.

After a time she began to think of finding a situation. It would have to be something quite special—something between a lady-in-waiting and chaperon, which would not be at variance with her former high station and ladylike dignity.

This sort of position seemed remarkably scarce. The only result of all her efforts was to win the tender regard of a few old gentlemen who called on her at dusk and would not go till they were shown the door. So, utterly discouraged, she gave up calling at employment agencies and ringing at front doors, though she could not resign herself yet to joining the ranks of shopgirls and dressmakers' apprentices. The day was still far off when she would have to do that; indeed, she would never sink so low, because she was labelled all over "Generalin," and wherever she went and whatever she did everyone recognised her supreme gentility.

On this seething human ocean she tossed anchorless, without so much as a straw to cling to. Nothing but Walter's letter,

which two months after her dismissal and his was forwarded to her by Fräulein von Schwertfeger. In it the poor fellow, whose own prospects were utterly blighted, made an unselfish suggestion of support for her future. It ran :

" GRACIOUS FRIEND,

" I am broke. He shot me through the arm. A trifling misfortune when it happens to someone else, but, when it falls on yourself, a damning obstacle in the way of founding a career on the other side of the Atlantic as head-waiter.

" Nevertheless, I cannot be grateful enough to fate for having thrown in my path so touchingly virtuous and lamb-like a guardian angel as my baronissima. You will readily understand, most dear and too-kind lady, that I now feel an obligation on my side to act as guardian angel to you. How is it to be done ? There are difficulties in the way, certainly. Were I to commend you to the care of my former friends and equals, your future, I am afraid, would be settled too easily, ' For, still, leaves and virtues ever fall in hours of tenderness.'

" For this reason I prefer to descend a degree lower, to where citizens crawl on their stomachs before our coronets, even if they be tarnished and dented.

" In Alte Jakobstrasse in Berlin there dwells a highly respectable manufacturer of bronze wares, by name Richard Dehnicke. He was a comrade of the Reserve, and feels himself particularly indebted to me because I borrowed money from him on more than one occasion. I am writing to him by the same mail as this. Go boldly in among his lamps and vases. The former I trust will illumine your nights, and the latter ornament your path through life. He will not, I believe, demand the price from you which others of our compatriots customarily consider their due where pretty women are concerned.

" There must be some cranks in the world, I suppose.

" My address in future will be—

" W. v. P.

" Street-loafer and Fortune's aspirant,

" Chicago (first stockyard on the left).

" PS.—Tommy would send his love, only I took care to plant a bullet in his forehead before leaving."



Lilly took this last and only communication from her comrade very calmly. She heard afterwards through Fräulein von Schwertfeger that he had sailed for America with a maimed arm. As he could think of her without bitterness or reproach, so she would try to think of him. Their love deserved honourable burial, even if its raptures had been a sham, and its elevated sentiments dragged through the dirt in shame.

He would like to be her "guardian angel," the dear little man had written. Well, anyhow, his letter offered a certain guarantee of protection in time of trouble, and indicated where a helping hand would be held out to her. But the course he advised she had no thought of adopting. Never would she avail herself of that helping-hand. She was in deadly terror of desirous masculine eyes reading her face, of masculine lips pouring out persuasive and convincing arguments.

She would take her fate in her own hands and go her own way. Whither it would lead her of course was not clear. In truth, grief and anxiety had rendered her so irresolute, that it needed but a breath of wind to drift her in a direction that would have decided her future once for all. The breath of wind, however, did not blow on her.

Month after month went by. Fräulein von Schwertfeger gave up writing. Want of money caused her little hoard of jewels to dwindle rapidly. The pensions she boarded in became more and more modest. Instead of Chilian attachés and Greek merchants, bankrupt auctioneers and clerks out of employment offered to cheer her evenings by forcing their company upon her; and the ladies who paid her visits in soiled tea-gowns glanced covetously at the few bracelets, brooches, and rings which she still had left. Thus she decided to end this mode of living and find a new one.

## CHAPTER II

**A**MONG highly recommended "best rooms" in Berlin belonging to apartments which had known much-boasted "better days," and now were let for thirty marks a week, including breakfast and attendance, to respectable young gentlewomen, were those of the widow, Klothilde Laue.

The furniture was upholstered in crimson plush, which had been the latest thing in decorations at the time of the Franco-Prussian war. There was a long mirror, the sides of which from top to bottom were fantastically plastered with new years' and birthday cards, and advertisements of soaps and powders. On the walls hung photographs of once famous actors, whose fame had meanwhile faded like the ink in which they had inscribed their autographs. The marble-topped washstand had an embroidered splasher bearing the following cryptic couplet :

" If you would wash yourself clean,  
Take care that your conscience is pure."

There were also endless photograph-albums, card-cases, a sandal-wood windmill meant to clip cigars, a green frosted glass punch-bowl, and a rickety pitch-pine bedstead, behind blue woollen curtains. Finally, to crown all, there hung over the sofa in a gilded glass case a mysterious globular-shaped creation, consisting of six plaited strands of tissue paper radiating from a common centre, and through its covering of gauze an ornamentation of pressed flowers was dimly discernible.

In this best room of 10, Neanderstrasse, situated up four flights of stairs above a china shop, a piano business on the hire system, and a studio for repairs, Lilly landed one day, to look out from the window on the greenish-grey waters of the Engelbecken and a strip of Berlin's smoky sky.

Frau Laue, an overworked, prematurely aged woman of fifty, with a face like a dried apple and great eyes that always looked tearful, revolved round her in incredulous admiration. She seemed unable to grasp that so much brilliance and beauty had positively strayed into her abode.

On the day of her arrival Lilly heard her whole history. Her husband had been cashier and book-keeper at one of the most popular variety theatres in Berlin, but twenty years ago he had died, leaving her pensionless in an unfeeling world where no rosy stage glamour disguises solitary tears, and no comic patter stills the pangs of hunger.

At this juncture that mysterious paper-creation, which on nearer inspection proved to be a lamp-shade, became her salvation. She had once been made a present of it by an artistic friend, and in her need she hit on the happy idea of making others after the same pattern and offering them for sale.

After years of hawking her wares about, after drudgery and disillusionment of all kinds, she had wrung from the public a market for "pressed flower lamp-shades," and a reputation as a specialist in this line of business.

In her back parlour, with one window, which smelt of hay and paste, and where on a long white deal table lay in their hundreds and thousands the skeletons of floral denizens of the Thuringian Forest—she could not, of course, afford the time to gather them herself—she had drudged for nearly two decades, tapping, daubing, pasting, drying, and threading sixteen hours a day, and had earned, thanks to her reputation as a specialist, enough to enable her to let her best room—her treasure-trove and sanctuary—to a stranger for thirty marks a month.

The two did not long remain strangers, however.

Into the back-room existence of this downtrodden being, before whose eyes the pictures of a few bedizened ballet-girls shone and glittered as paragons of unattainable magnificence, Lilly descended from the real aristocracy like a heaven-born divinity. Her landlady idolised her as an emissary from regions that she had believed hitherto were only possible in fiction; where such expressions as "footman," "drawing-room," "pearl necklace"—Lilly took care to tell all about hers—came quite naturally instead of being rolled on the tongue

and allowed slowly to melt as with closed eyes one conjured up the surroundings to which such a vocabulary belonged.

Frau Laue became in very early days Lilly's confidante and adviser. She helped her to live down the shame following her divorce, she cheered her when a feeling of desolation overcame her, and painted for her a future in radiant colours.

No one need perish in a great powerful miracle-working city like Berlin. Every day there were dozens of happy chances that might set you on your legs again. There were lonely old ladies dying to find someone to whom they could leave their money; there were aristocratic young ones who yearned to hold out a hand of sympathy and friendship to a poor, beautiful orphaned sister; there were famous artists who would gladly escape from the snares laid for them by female admirers in the arms of a good woman; and there were great poets with whom the post of muse was vacant. In fact, one of the greatest capitals in the world, it would appear, had only been waiting for Lilly's advent to lift her to its throne as conquering heroine.

Again the months passed. Regret for her wasted opportunities became gradually less acute. Her nights were calmer and no longer disturbed by this or that scene from her lost paradise rising before her vision with horrible clearness, when she was in a state between sleeping and waking, to make her start up and cry aloud.

One lesson, however, she had not learnt, and that was to estimate correctly how brief had been her sojourn in high places: she could not accept it as a mere episode that had interrupted the ordinary course of her real life like a capricious dream. In her inner consciousness she continued to be a kind of enchanted princess who, in the disguise of a beggar, went about unknown and unrecognised till such time as Divine dispensation should reinstate her and restore her lawful rights.

With anxious solicitude she clung to everything that reminded her of her vanished splendour. In Frau Laue's wardrobe she hung the festive raiment that the colonel had ordered for her in Dresden, Frau Laue's empty drawers were filled with the snowy fragrance of her coronet-embroidered underclothes, and in front of the big mirror in Frau Laue's best room were ranged the costly ivory and gold toilette articles, which once had proudly graced her dressing-table

in the "boudoir." These, too, still bore the seven-pointed coronet, and to think of parting with them would have seemed an outrage to Lilly on her most sacred property. She stood waiting meanwhile for what the future would bring forth. She still studied advertisements and wrote letters applying for vacant situations, but very often forgot to post the letters.

For the sake of having something to do, and craving for companionship of some kind, she began to sit with Frau Laue in the back room and help her with her work. Soon she tapped, cut out, daubed, pasted, and plaited as diligently as her instructress, and as in her cradle she had been endowed with a gift and taste for all things artistic, she speedily excelled Frau Laue, who, when she returned from disposing of the lamp-shades, would relate without envy that the flower pattern Lilly had designed had been singled out for admiration, and that the shades she made were preferred to her own.

Her ambition was aroused. She strove to produce works of art, and never tired of toiling for this end.

"If you didn't waste so much time over every little bunch of flowers," said Frau Laue, who shared honestly with Lilly the proceeds of their joint labours, "you might earn more than I do."

But Lilly was content with the forty or fifty marks a month that her work brought in. Her new craze for lamp-shade making led her on to higher aims. The dried grasses, or grass flowers, as Frau Laue called them, specially took her fancy. Their slender graceful stalks, the delicacy of their veinings, the melancholy charm with which they drooped, reminded her of little forest trees, weeping willows beside brooks, ashes bending over marble tombs, or palms waving yearning fronds on torrid rocks.

She dreamt of starting a new kind of art. She would paint on transparent plaques of glass with dried grass foregrounds. She would paint lamp-shades and window-blinds with woods of flowering grass and ferns, with little cottages in relief, with their doors and windows cut out as if light were shining from inside; fleecy clouds, pink sunsets, lines of misty hills, dark-blue rivers in which the moon was reflected, building across them bridges of light.

The pictures succeeded each other in her brain with inexhaustible fecundity; there seemed no end to them. It was

difficult to know where to begin with such a vast wealth of ideas at one's disposal.

Frau Laue, who had been pasting her oil paper in exactly the same way for twenty years, had a horror of innovations, and warned Lilly to stick to her last. But a demon of inventiveness possessed Lilly. One day she made a tremendous *coup*. She took her arrow-shaped brooch set with six small emeralds to a jeweller, who gave her eighty marks for it—needless to say, the brooch was worth five times as much—and purchased on her way home after the transaction several cut-glass plaques, held together in pairs by screws, so that they could be easily attached to the window-panes. She also invested in a paint-box, and while Frau Laue clasped her hands in dismay to her head, Lilly set to work gallantly. But her practical knowledge of art had no foundation except in the memory of a few water-colour lessons at school, and it failed her utterly. The colours ran into each other, and the woods in the foreground would not look as if they had anything to do with the landscape behind, but remained simply grasses straggling about objectlessly.

For a long time Lilly struggled to gain her effects, then, crying bitterly, she threw the rubbish into a corner, and returned sorrowfully to lamp-shades again.

Frau Laue, who had sulked and scarcely spoken during the weeks of Lilly's apostacy, began once more to make plans and to build castles in the air for her. All the wild schemes that for the last twenty years had taken shape in her poor brain were now, when she had no hope of maturing them for herself, freely poured into Lilly's outstretched palm.

She listened eagerly, yet as her days passed thus a feeling of depression grew—almost imperceptibly. She felt herself sinking into this sordid groove, and a feeling of repulsion took possession of her for the narrow-minded creature in whose great moist red-rimmed eyes still lingered a hope for an unattainable happiness, though her lamp-shade drudgery had brought her nearly to the brink of the grave.

This repulsion was often so powerful that she was compelled to rush out ; she didn't care where so long as it was out into the world, into life.

She did not stay long ; in an hour or less she was back again. The streets frightened her. The painted women who jostled her, the bold, adventurous youths who followed

on her heels, the callous indifference with which everyone elbowed his way through the hurly-burly—all this scared and made a coward of her.

A gloomy foreboding told her that she would never regain her self-reliant joy in combat. When she compared what she was now with the little shopgirl who gave out Frau Asmussen's trashy volumes in sheltered security, confident that she was doing her duty and always in the right, even when beaten for telling lies and obviously in the wrong, she felt she was a helpless straw drifting on the waters.

Then this waiting, waiting; this sleepless, hungry waiting! What for? She did not know herself. But something must happen. She could not exist for ever among these snippets of oiled paper, live and die making lamp-shades. Sometimes the thought of Walter's rich manufacturer of bronze wares cropped up in her mind with a longing which had to be suppressed. She was alarmed to find herself clinging to this shadow, and chased it away.

A year had passed since that letter of introduction was written. It would be far too late to avail herself of it now. So she went on waiting.

Often as she undressed and caught the reflection of herself in the glass, her form consecrated by beauty, round and slender limbed, her long-lashed wistful eyes, her ripe mouth shaped for kisses, she would be seized with glad ecstasy, and say to herself, "Am I like that?" And then she would revel in a sense of her youth and readiness for love. Then the whole world seemed there for no other object than to press her to its heart. Then this dreary round of drudgery was a good thing in disguise, for it was bracing her up for flights of intoxicating enjoyment. When she stretched herself on the sofa at dusk to rest, and she saw the blue flash made by the electric trams flit across the ceiling, blissful dreams stole upon her and transformed that burning fever of expectancy into half-fulfilled delights; a feeling of having been saved rose like a thanksgiving in her soul, and what she had been bewailing as lost happiness became nothing but a nightmare from which she was grateful to be relieved. But these moods were rare, and they resembled the mirage of thirsty travellers rather than the refreshing waters.

The winter passed in rain and fog; mild March evenings

came when rosy cloudlets floated over the housetops, and then spring was really there. The trim little trees in the squares put forth their brown buds, which by degrees burst into pale green leaves. Lilly saw as little of the riot of blossom out of doors, the white foam of the cherry-trees, the red glory of the hawthorn, as she had done when she swept the golden dust that sprang from Frau Asmussen's bookcases. Frau Laue did not care to take walks and expose herself to temptation. For to see a park and not collect plants, a garden gate, and not thrust your hand through it to pick flowers, was to her an altogether inconceivable act of self-restraint. Lilly would not go out without her, for she dreaded being alone in a crowd.

Warm, oppressive Sunday afternoons followed, when end-less troops of townsfolk make pilgrimages to the suburbs and country round, when the streets stretch away in empty desolation, and the sultry skies seem to weigh down suffocatingly on the unfortunate people left at home, panting within four walls. On such afternoons Frau Laue put on a pair of real Rhinestone earrings, a brown velveteen dress with a collar of black sequins on the square-cut neck, and in this festive attire paid Lilly a formal visit in the best room. Then the Dresden evening gowns came out of the wardrobe, and entered into competition with those worn twenty-five years ago by frail ladies in the stage box of the variety theatre. The faded photographs of long-extinguished stars would be brought down from the wall and their charms examined. Apropos of these, thrilling stories would be related of personal adventures, in which, amid much laxity of morals and gay peccadilloes, matrimonial fidelity had maintained its modest value.

The summer Sunday afternoon would wear away, wan and exhausted as a fever patient, a stifling breeze blow in at the window. The varnish on the cheap rosewood furniture would reek, the houses opposite shine as if they were perspiring, and Frau Laue, munching her bread and cheese, would once more repeat the oft-told tale of her virtuous married life.

When at last she took her departure, Lilly would sink groaning on her bed, hide her face in the stuffy pillows, and listen to the shouts of the merry-makers in the street below returning from their trips. The next morning the pressing and pasting of flowers would begin again with renewed vigour.



July came, and she could stand it no longer. One Monday morning, when daylight found her awake and waiting, her pillow soaked with tears, a sudden longing for life so warm and irresistible filled her heart that she bounded out of bed with an exultant cry.

Resolve cried within her, "I'll do it to-day—to-day! Go on a begging expedition to that unknown man." No, it would not be begging. God forbid! Long ago she had settled in her mind what line she would take. She would merely ask for advice such as he, a connoisseur with a wide experience in arts and crafts, would be able to give the inquiring amateur, anxious to learn, in a few minutes.

Where and how she could get good lessons in painting transparencies on glass plaques, was the question she wanted to ask him. And whatever his answer might be, it would be the first step in a new phase of life.

## CHAPTER III

**W**AS it the path of fate that she pursued ?

The street looked the same as usual. Vans rumbled along, housewives crowded in front of the butchers' doing their marketing, young men hurried by with rolls of music and books under their arms, but were not in too great a hurry to turn round and look after her, causing her, as of old, mingled feelings of satisfaction and annoyance.

The path of fate ? Yes, said the throbbing of her heart. She felt almost as if she were on her way to exhibit herself for sale. Herself ? How much was there of her left, of her little stock of pride, of her faith in herself as one of the elect, her belief in the great miracle that was to happen to her ? How much ?

Her walk took over an hour. She lost her way and was put right by policemen. She stopped to look at her reflection in the shop-windows, for she was afraid of not pleasing. But every time she saw the soft curves of her slight tall figure, with its nonchalant dignity of carriage, she breathed a sigh of relief.

At last, when she read the name of the street in which he lived, she started. She had hoped in secret that she would not be able to find it after all, and have to go home. There was nothing remarkable about his house. It was a grey four-storied building, with a wide unadorned entrance, across which a board was erected.

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was inscribed in gold letters on a massive wrought-iron plate, which extended half the width of the house.

From the opposite side of the street she took in every detail, still asking herself whether she should not turn round and

go home. The windows on the first floor were closely hung with delicate primrose-coloured curtains embroidered with gold thread in a broken conventional pattern. Out of snow-white china flower-pots nodded geraniums and pinks, and on the whole everything here looked better kept and more prosperous than its surroundings.

"He lives on that floor, I expect," she thought, feeling slightly awed at the chaste severity of the exterior decorations.

Then she took heart, crossed the street, and made straight for the door of latticed ironwork, which was close to the carriage entrance, and probably led up to that impressive first floor. But this door was fast locked, and before ringing she glanced through the lattice and beheld a stately garden stairway flanked by cypresses and laurels ascending to a landing where a stained-glass window cast ruby and sapphire rays on a fair white statue. It was the bust of Clytie, which she had always admired in the art shops because of its gentle melancholy.

Her heart sank again at all this splendour. She seemed unworthy of breaking in on such decorous calm, so she sprang down the steps again and preferred to enter by the general entrance, where some workmen were busy facing the bare bricks with ornamental stucco. In the yard men were at work, too. The cobble-stones, with which it had evidently been hitherto covered, were piled in clumsy heaps, and mosaic tiles with white circles on a grey ground, such as one sees in churches, were being laid. At the back of the yard rose the red bald brick walls of the factory itself. But this too appeared to be included in the universal beautifying scheme, and was undergoing alterations. As far as the second story the walls were being inlaid with a dado of yellow and blue, which looked very gay. In fact, the old dingy aspect of the yard was being gradually converted into the elegance of a room.

"They are doing things artistically here," Lilly thought, and felt still more nervous.

On her left she saw a corner building that so far had escaped a drop of renovating paint or varnish. In contrast to the rest, its bare plaster walls presented a dirty, chalky, and almost forlorn appearance. At the top of its plain iron steps was a brass tablet bearing the words "Office" on its face. Lilly ascended the steps and entered an ill-lighted dusty apartment

divided into two parts by a wooden railing. In the further division half a dozen young men sat at desks covered with shabby green baize. At her entrance they riveted their eyes on her in gaping astonishment, and it did not apparently occur to any of them to ask what she wanted. It was evident that such a dazzling apparition as herself had never been seen in the office within the memory of man. Not till she had taken a card from her brocaded wrist-bag and laid it silently on the table did the petrified company show signs of life. Then they all jumped up with one accord and scuffled for the card. It was almost a free fight.

A lank, pasty, overgrown youth, who seemed to have authority over the rest, finally sent the others back to their places, and bowing and scraping to Lilly, murmured that he would inform "the Chief" of her presence, and he disappeared with the card in his hand into a back room.

A few moments elapsed. Lilly heard through the half-open door a lowered voice say, "Czepanek? Don't know the name. Ask her what she wants. What's she like?"

The answer, which was inaudible, lasted several seconds and evidently was satisfactory, for the clerk came out, and without further inquiry let Lilly through, and ushered her into the private room at the back of the office.

Now she saw him in the flesh. He was a thick-set man, of middle height—shorter than she was—inclined to corpulency, with a round fresh-complexioned face, nice greyish-blue eyes, without any expression, a high forehead, and arched eyebrows. His hair was light brown, brushed smoothly back from his temples, and his moustache turned up abruptly at the ends to mark the Lieutenant. He had remarkably small ears and small hands. His whole person breathed scrupulous neatness and cleanliness, and, if anything, he was too well groomed.

He was clearly taken aback when he saw Lilly. His eyes widened with polite amazement.

Consciousness that she had made an impression gave her back her self-assurance and *sang-froid*. Not in vain had she gone through Fräulein von Schwertfeger's training.

"The introduction of a mutual friend, who has, I think, prepared you for my visit, brings me to you," she began, inwardly rejoiced to have a chance once more of playing the great lady.

In a mirror hanging opposite Lilly saw with satisfaction the reflection of her heliotrope toque, with its wreath of violets and swathing of tulle, her heliotrope tailor-made costume, with its correctly cut long coat, and felt as if she had stepped out of the picture of a society portrait-painter.

In silence he offered her a chair. The surprise that his manner had at first shown was succeeded by an air of distrustful perplexity. Apparently he was puzzled as to her social rank.

His head was inclined slightly to the left, as if it were stiff from a recent attack of rheumatism. This pose increased Lilly's suspicion that he did not altogether trust her.

She looked down at her brocaded wrist-bag and pretended to be suppressing a smile.

He grew more embarrassed. "May I ask," he stammered, "who the mutual friend . . . er . . . is? I don't seem to . . . recollect."

He turned over the visiting-card, which his clerk had handed to him, in desperation.

She shrank from being forced into mentioning the name of her former lover, and so exposing her shame to this man who lived behind china flower-pots.

"Is it possible that you don't remember," she answered hesitatingly, "receiving a letter from a comrade in your regiment, asking you to interest yourself in a . . . a lady——?"

He jumped to his feet and flushed to the roots of his hair. His pupils dilated so visibly between his wide-stretched lids that she thought his eyes were going to start out of his head.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "You refer to a letter which I had nearly a year and a half ago from Lieutenant von Prell?"

"Yes," Lilly said.

"But, gracious baroness," he exclaimed, completely losing his self-possession, "if I had suspected . . . could have had the least idea that the gracious baroness . . ." And his face depicted so much grovelling reverence that Lilly's feeling of innate aristocracy again came to the surface, but he had to be undeceived.

"I call myself Lilly Czepanek now," she murmured, congratulating herself on the happy phrase, "I call myself,"

which left it open for him to suppose that she had chosen voluntarily to resume her maiden name.

Alarm at the blunder he imagined himself to have committed was to be read on his features.

"I am sorry," he said; "I ought to have remembered that the gracious baroness must have gone through many trials." Then he blurted out: "Why didn't you come sooner? I waited, waited, and waited—a month, six months. . . . Then I started searching for you, with no results; but I half thought of employing a detective, only I feared to transgress the bounds of delicacy . . ."

Lilly nodded encouragingly. She appreciated his scruples.

"Unfortunately, it never struck me to search for you under another name. . . . So I had to abandon the hope of ever having the great pleasure . . ."

Here, in the intensity of his emotions of delight, he would have grasped her hand, but he had the tact to resist the impulse when he saw that she did not respond.

Lilly was conscious of being mistress of the situation. She felt so saturated with the romance of martyrdom, so surrounded by the delicious incense of lofty aloofness, that it was as if she had stepped out of the pages of one of Frau Asmussen's novels into the light of day.

"I am grateful to you, Herr—Leutnant." She could not bring the plebeian name of Dehnicke over her lips. "Now I feel that I have not knocked at your door in vain."

"I can assure you," he replied, cocking his head still more to the left as a sign of his good-will, "that I place myself entirely at your service, all I am and all I—" He was going to say "have," but as an astute man of business he hesitated to commit himself so lightly.

"Of course, I shall not impose on you too much," she replied airily, in order to damp his ardour a little. "I simply wish to be put in the way of earning my living, and to have someone who will advise me, and, as Herr von Prell"—now his name was spoken—"said that I might have absolute confidence in you—"

"Indeed, you may rely on me as on yourself," he could not forbear from assuring her.

"That would not mean much," she thought, but took care not to betray what passed through her mind by even a smile.

"Have you, by-the-by, heard anything from him lately?" he asked.

She blushed. To admit that she hadn't would expose his treatment of her. So, not to appear in the light of being neglected and cast off, she said:

"We promised each other at parting not to write. We thought it would be best in the struggle that lay before us not to be always looking out for letters, and expecting to hear from one another. But you probably have heard from him, have you not?"

He started and reflected a moment. "Yes . . . that is to say . . . not recently. . . . Some time back he wrote that he was getting on all right. He was starting a career. He made urgent inquiries after the gracious baroness's whereabouts, and I, of course, was not fortunate enough to be able to enlighten him."

This sounded scarcely likely. A moment before he had asked her for news of Walter, and now when she asked him what Walter's address was, he was compelled to confess that his letter had given no address.

It was plain that he had lied.

It may have been that he hoped to raise her opinion of him by representing himself to be still on terms of friendship with her lover, and, as she for a similar motive had not strictly adhered to the truth, she could not very well blame him.

She now went on to explain the purpose of her visit. She told him of her difficulties with the delicate art which she had taken up a few months ago, of her desire to improve and perfect herself. Would he be so kind as to put her on the right road by recommending some artist who would give her lessons? This was really the only reason why she had called on him.

He listened with close attention, as if he took a professional interest in her future. But behind his gravity there lay something that disquieted her. It was certainly not pity, rather was it a sort of restraint, a concealment of the fact that the more she revealed the helplessness of her position the more he felt he was gaining some advantage.

"A perfectly simple matter, gracious Frau," he replied, and his manner was more natural than heretofore. "I have several good painters among the artists who supply models for my business. One of them," he turned over the pages of an address-book, "Kellermann . . . is the very man . . .

but of that we can talk later. What seems to me of the first importance in the art you have chosen are other things. So you will pardon my indiscretion, I hope, if I ask you a few questions ? ”

She nodded assent.

“ What training have you had in Art ? ”

“ That is just it,” she replied, struggling with her embarrassment ; “ it is because I have had no training that I want to learn.”

He did not move a muscle.

“ What are your means of support ? ” he asked next.

She was silent. She began to feel as if she were being stripped of every rag she had on.

“ You understand, of course,” he added, “ that I haven't the least intention of prying into your private affairs, but as you did me the honour of asking my advice . . . ”

“ I have a few ornaments,” she said, looking him straight in the eyes with proud defiance. “ When they come to an end I shall have nothing.”

He inclined his head as much as to say, “ I thought so.”

“ And one more question : Where are you living at present ? ”

“ I am living, as befits my means, up four flights of stairs with a poor woman who has taught me how to press flowers.”

As she said this she caught sight, in the glass opposite, of the elegant woman of the world who had condescended to pay Herr Dehnicke, “ comrade of the Reserves,” a visit in his gloomy hole of an office.

He rose and paced up and down a few seconds between the writing-table and door. His clothes were so tight and new that he crackled and creaked at every movement. He looked as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox, he was so polished and rotund. He was a little bit bald too, already. His face remained very serious, almost careworn. It seemed as if her hard lot weighed him to the earth.

“ My dear madam,” he began, pausing in front of her, and his voice trembled a little, “ what I am going to say to you is only prompted by the memory of the many years of sincere friendship that have existed between Herr von Prell and me . . . ”

The scornful, patronising way in which Walter had referred to him in his letter came back to Lilly.



"I have had so many happy, jolly hours in his society. I am indebted to him for so much kindness . . ." He stopped. He could not, indebted as he was, name the kindness. . . . "All my life long I shall be grateful to him."

Lilly recalled Walter's words: "He feels himself particularly indebted to me because I borrowed money from him on more than one occasion."

It was really refreshing to meet with such touching loyalty.

"But what I am most grateful to him for is that he should place such confidence in me as to entrust his fiancée to my care."

"Fiancée!" Her ears had not deceived her; he had actually pronounced the word. She was startled, but did not contradict him. Until that moment it had never entered her head to consider that there was any binding tie between her and Walter—the poor little irresponsible fellow who could not be expected to look after himself, much less a wife and child. But in the eyes of this man of middle-class morals, and perhaps not only in his but in the eyes of the world, and in her own, the only excuse for her irregular, bungled existence lay in this contingency. If she centred all her hopes and wishes on the absent one whom she never imagined she would see again, she would have a new anchor to cling to. She might even justify herself before God and hope for absolution.

This all flashed through her mind while Herr Dehnicke continued to assure her of his friendship for Walter, and fasten on her round eyes of disinterested adoration.

"As his representative, and for his sake," he said, coming to the point, "I would urge you most seriously, dear madam, to quit surroundings that are not congenial to you, and find others more fitting to your former rank. It is absolutely necessary if you wish to put your plans into execution."

"What have my surroundings to do with my art?" she asked, shrugging her shoulders.

"Well, to begin with, you certainly must have a studio in which you can receive your customers, . . . where you can show them who you are, and what you can do, and how far you are capable of carrying out your designs. This is the only method of ensuring those who give you orders treating you as a crafts-woman and not a mere ordinary work-woman."

"But they won't come to me to give their orders," she interposed.

"They should do so, undoubtedly," he exclaimed, working himself up into a decorous enthusiasm. "An artist who has any self-respect ought never to step outside his door to offer his wares to the public, and I advise you to act on this principle."

She mentally calculated the number of rings, pendants, and bracelets that she had left, and replied, smiling:

"It's more easily said than done."

He grew bold. "My old and intimate friendship with Walter"—he used his Christian name for the first time—"entitles me to the privilege of—how shall I put it?—making provision . . ."

She foresaw what was coming and choked him off.

"I am quite content where I am," she declared. "And till I am able, out of my own resources, to provide myself with the surroundings you are kind enough to wish for me, I do not feel justified in making a change."

He bowed, his zeal perceptibly cooled. He asked her at least to leave her present address; so that he might send her the desired information.

Hesitating, she gave the number and name of the street where she lodged, and added the request that he would not think of calling on her.

He bowed again stiffly. His coolness increased and he became almost rigid.

She felt glad that she had understood so well how to keep him at a distance. No one could say she was a beggar after this.

She took leave graciously, for it was not her intention to snub him too mercilessly.

He was quick to take advantage of her warmer tone, and became ardent again.

"Was there anything else that he could do for her? . . . Did she feel lonely? Did she wish for society?"

She glanced at his right hand, on which there was no wedding-ring, and shook her head, smiling.

He had perfectly understood both glance and smile, and, struggling with a fresh attack of embarrassment, he cleared his throat and said:

"I live alone with my mother, but, unfortunately, I cannot ask you to come and see her, as she is in very poor health, and since my father's death sees nobody. But I might introduce you to a few people of irreproachable position, of course if you cared to know them."

"Thank you very much," Lilly replied patronisingly. "Naturally, I should take for granted that you would only introduce me to nice people. But, in spite of that, I think I would rather not. It will be best, at present, for me to do without society."

With this she made a regal inclination of her head, held out her hand, and departed.

He followed her deferentially to the door, and the six young gentlemen stood up with one accord in a row and bowed like their master.

She passed out through the unfinished alterations in the courtyard, with flushed cheeks. When she was out in the street her mood was one of mingled triumph and disappointment. "No, that was *not* my path of fate," she said to herself.

But she had unexpectedly acquired a fiancé, and that was something.

## CHAPTER IV

AUGUST KELLERMANN passed for an artist of considerable reputation, though his pictures did not sell. He was a sharp-witted, sharp-tongued, good-natured person in the middle of the thirties, well-versed in all the vices of the capital. He had a sandy Rubens beard, prominent little eyes, with an eternal weariness in them as if he had never been in bed the night before.

He rented a studio that had once been a photographer's. It was of huge dimensions, like a magnified glass case. He had draped the roof, as a protection from glare and heat, with Turkish rugs propped by poles, giving his studio the air of a Bedouin's tent.

When Lilly stepped out of the dim twilight of the ante-room into the garish brilliance of the studio, which was so lofty it seemed part of the sky, she found him in a plum-coloured overall, with green down-at-heel slippers over which his red plaid socks hung in rucks, seated on the floor, beside an Oriental coffee apparatus, stirring an extinguished spirit-lamp.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, without getting up to return her greeting; "this is a visit worth having."

Lilly turned to go away again, and he immediately sprang to his feet, pulled up his trousers, and with a shrug of his shoulders dusted a bamboo chair with his sleeve.

"Sit down, my child. Though I have nearly given up painting for pottery, and couldn't make use of Helen of Troy herself as a model, I am not going to let you slip through my fingers."

Lilly handed him her benefactor's letter of introduction, and pointed out his mistake. "Now he'll change his behaviour," she thought. But nothing of the sort happened.

"What a bore!" he said, scratching his head. "Most

noble of women, why are you so beautiful? Ex-general's wife!"—here she was, labelled again—"I should have expected eye-glasses and pimples, and *you* come along!"

"You probably know my reasons for coming to you?" asked Lilly, too downhearted to resent his manner.

He clapped his fleshy hand to his forehead.

"Let me see! Let me see! The worthy Dehnicke, who is my dry-bread giver—'dry' referring to giver as well as bread—did, I think, mention the matter to me a day or two ago; but I suffer from a congenital dulness of comprehension, perhaps you will kindly . . . er . . . ?"

Lilly explained what she wanted, and he burst into uncontrollable laughter.

"Yes, my fair noblewoman, I'll give you the benefit of my instruction—and would 'lo it, even if you hadn't entered the world like Venus! Such a chance doesn't come in my way every day. I promise to charm sunsets out of the sky and perpetrate them on glass for you in hues so vivid that you'll never care to look a raspberry in the face again."

Lilly was quite aware that if she had stood on her dignity as "noblewoman" she would have at once left the studio. But her desire to turn his readiness to teach her to account was too strong. She could not sacrifice the opportunity so carefully obtained.

"I wonder what Anna von Schwertfeger would say?" she thought. And then, with a toss of her head, she said:

"There are certain preliminaries to be arranged before we go on. First, I wish to know distinctly what your terms are, so that I may make up my mind whether I can afford your services."

He looked a little dashed, and said that he supposed Herr Dehnicke would arrange the matter.

"Herr Dehnicke has nothing at all to do with my financial affairs," she replied. "Should there be any misunderstanding on this point . . . ." She took up her sunshade; her gloves were already on.

"Now, now, don't be so hasty," he said; and after reflecting a few moments he named a charge of five marks for the morning's lesson.

"My ruby ring will just do it," Lilly thought, and agreed to the sum.

"Well," he said, "I am curious as to the other preliminaries."

"It's only this. I wish to be treated like a lady."

"Ah, indeed! I'm not refined enough for you, eh? But I tell you I can be as much as you like. I have six degrees of refinement, so you've only got to choose: extra refined, super-refined, highly refined, medium refined, unrefined, and beastly vulgar. Now take your choice."

Lilly was so delighted with this pleasantry and others of the same sort, that she yielded her claims to consideration as a *grande dame*, and was content to be on terms of "hail fellow, well met" with him so long as he didn't pay compliments. However, her reminder was not without effect, and when she came again the next day he had even put on a pair of boots.

On the whole, he proved to be an intelligent and kindly master, who did not expect too great things of his pupil; and took an encouraging interest in her childish ambition. He contrived a medium out of gelatine especially for her work, which threw up the brilliancy of the transparent colouring, and he was indefatigable in suggesting new combinations.

"I'll make you half a dozen blood-red sunsets," he said, "that will knock all competitors out of the field, including that unconscionable old lady who commits the most glaring impertinences. I mean, of course, Dame Nature."

While she splashed colour on a window-pane he stood smoking Turkish tobacco and chewing ginger before one of the modelling easels that filled the middle of the studio. Here he "pottered" away, as he expressed it, at his modelling in bronze. For the most part it was human figures that he created out of "the depths of his soul," half or three parts life-size: armoured knights with banners, girls in old German dress with problematically outstretched arms, allegorical female forms likewise employed, heralds trumpeting, and now and again impressionist nudity, long, too-lim limbs, and nixie bodies wriggling off into mermaids' tails; ash-trays, finger-bowls, and other utilitarian articles. And all the time there hung or leaned against the walls, covered with dust, half-finished pictures and sketches of daring originality and riotous delight in colour, every one stamped with unpremeditated power and joyous ease in execution. There was a half-ruined chapel in a tropical forest, on the high altar of which a herd of monkeys were gambolling; in a monotonous desert background a group of stubborn-eyed camels drew round the dead body of a lion, sniffing it; best of all was the nude

figure of a woman loaded with chains, her white limbs shining out in relief from a rugged barren rock, and round her head swooping a horde of red-eyed vultures. There was much else that showed restrained strength and wealth of imagination; but the woman in chains remained Lilly's favourite.

One day she ventured to ask her master why he left all these things unfinished, instead of working them up for exhibitions.

"Because I have to turn out pot-boilers, you unsuspecting angel," he replied, laughing, and slapped a clod of wet clay against the leg of the allegorical lady whom he had in hand; "because the world wants lamp-stands and flower-vases, but no immortal beauty with mother-wit inside her body to boot; . . . because there are manufacturers of imitation bronze wares who keep you from the workhouse; and because I am a chap with sound teeth who wants a few crusts of life to masticate after twenty years of fasting, and will hunt for once with the worshippers of Dionysus. Can you, with your five-o'clock tea soul, grasp that . . . ?"

"But could you not at least finish the woman with the chains?" she urged.

He broke into a shrill laugh of self-contempt, and threw himself full length on the fur-covered couch which stood in the most shadowed corner of the glass-walled room. Then he sprang up again and offered Lilly ginger out of the pot he always kept handy.

She thanked him and pressed for an answer to her question.

"Dear God! Have you no conception of how heavily loaded everyone is in this world with his own chains? Divine fire would have to descend from heaven and melt my handcuffs—or the goddess herself must appear in the flesh, throw her clothes on that chair, and say, 'Here I am, dear sir. This is the body born from the foam. . . . Now, fire away; look and paint your fill.'"

He had stopped in front of her, chewing ginger, and raised his clasped hands to her in an attitude of petition.

"How funny you are!" she said in confusion. "What does it concern me?"

"I am not going to say," he said. "I am by a long way too damnably full of respect. . . . But if one day my chain-loaded beauty is sick of crying to be set free—she cries to be set free day and night, and often keeps me awake—

then maybe a miracle will come to pass and someone who is now flushing up to her eyes will come and——"

"I think we had better go on with our work," Lilly cut him short.

From that day she was careful to keep off the subject of the picture, and she did not dare so much as to glance across at it if Herr Kellermann was looking ; but, all the same, he made constant allusions to his presumptuous idea, which seemed to obsess him, and at last Lilly had to forbid him to mention it.

Her enthusiasm for her work grew day by day. She was not content with the lessons in the studio, she practised at home, and when she tried her newly acquired talent on the glass plaques she had purchased, the results were, both in her own and Frau Laue's opinion, highly creditable. The sunsets ran blood-red over cornflower blue hills, and in the foreground stood dark silent primæval forests of grass and ferns, shading huts which had been built and brilliantly illuminated apparently by a prehistoric race of men.

She had never shown any of her performances to her master, for he had declared that he could not on principle tolerate such paste-and-scissors atrocities. But Herr Dehnicke would have been interested, she was sure, in her progress, and she would dearly have loved to show him her works of art.

Unfortunately, since his letter of introduction to Herr Kellermann she had heard no more from him, and she felt a little piqued at being so easily forgotten.

One day Herr Kellermann said suddenly : " By Jove ! The bronze business has begun to boom all at once. Our Herr Dehnicke keeps me at it with orders. He's up here nearly every day to see how things are getting on."

Something in his manner as he said this, with his eyes blinking at her, made Lilly redden and feel uncomfortable, though it filled her at the same time with a quiet satisfaction. And when at last the seven pairs of glass plaques were finished, she was so brimming over with pride in them that she couldn't keep it all to herself, and boldly wrote him a note on her superb ivory paper, with the seven-pointed gold coronet, of which she had about twenty sheets left. Would he, she wrote, come next Sunday afternoon, as he had been so good as to take an interest in her work ?

An answer came at once. Nothing could have given him greater pleasure than her kind letter ; he had been longing



to come and see her, and he hoped that she wouldn't doubt that it was only out of regard for her wishes that he had kept away.

On the appointed Sunday afternoon he appeared. Lilly arranged a plant of gladiolas in the punch-bowl, and pink carnations round the box containing the specimen lamp-shade. Fastened against the windows by ribbon bows hung the glorious sunsets like conflagrations, casting a magic glow over the room and the tawdry treasures which Frau Laue had preserved with her own character from "better times." Lilly presented a gay and charming appearance in the white lace blouse washed and ironed by her own hands; and when she went to receive her guest, who stood at the door in patent-leather boots, with a top-hat in his hand, she was quite the self-possessed, condescending unapproachable fine lady who had entered his office a few weeks before.

Her benefactor was all the more embarrassed. He sniffed the frowsy odour which reached Frau Laue's best room from the other part of the house, cast uneasy glances at the walls, and behaved altogether as if he were poaching on forbidden ground.

He could not express how happy he was that she had at last given him permission to call . . . he had not wished to be intrusive . . . he would have deferred coming still longer if her note had not set his mind at rest . . . and so on. He repeated all he had said in his letter in a nervous, stumbling way, which was hardly in keeping with his elegant attire and naturally frigid manner.

She, on her side, thanked him in a friendly tone for all the favours he had done her, and she was sorry to have given him the trouble of coming to see her; and as she said all this she felt, against her will, quite the "Frau Generalin" doing the honours of her drawing-room with sociable courtesy.

By degrees she brought the conversation round to her work, deplored her artistic incompetence, and pointed to the sunsets glowing on the window-panes.

Herr Dehnicke sprang up, and after a moment's silent contemplation burst into raptures of enthusiasm, for each of which he had to draw fresh breath and repeat himself rather mechanically, while he maintained an awkward smile. But Lilly was far too delighted to suspect that his favourable criticism wasn't genuine. He asked if she had shown the

transparencies to Herr Kellermann. She confessed that she had lacked the courage. "Besides, I wanted you to see them first," she said.

His eyes did her grateful homage as he remarked, "If you haven't yet done so, I strongly advise you to omit it altogether. The man, obliging as he seems, is really a mass of professional conceit, and he would probably . . ."

He seemed afraid to say more.

Lilly plucked up courage to ask casually, as if it didn't matter much, whether he thought she would find purchasers for her work.

He was silent again, and scratched meditatively the place to which the left end of his moustache was glued. Then, putting his round smooth head very much on one side, he said, carefully weighing his words :

"You had much better, dear lady, entrust the sale of your stuff to me. You see, I have my customers, and I know what buying is. I might set your glass-work in bronze frames or something similar, and they would pass, doubtless, as goods of my own."

Gratitude bubbled up warmly within her.

"Oh, will you really do that ?" she cried, grasping his hand. "I shall be very pleased to let you, till I have found customers for myself."

The pressure of her hand turned him scarlet to the roots of his hair.

"To achieve that," he said, looking the other way bashfully, "it is above all things necessary that the gracious baroness doesn't hesitate any longer to establish herself in a home that is worthy of her."

"I shall be only too glad," she replied merrily, "when I can afford it."

"It may be years before you can," he interposed.

"Well, I don't mind waiting years."

"Allow me," he stammered, "to remind you once more, that as an old and intimate friend of your fiancé, I am entitled——"

She drew herself up. "If my fiancé," she said, "was, or is ever likely to be, in a position to support me, I perhaps should not refuse ; but as matters stand I can permit no one in the world, not even his dearest friend, to make me offers that can only humiliate me in the end."

She turned her face aside to hide how hurt she felt.

He instantly hung his head in penitence, nevertheless there was a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

It was then arranged that one of his vans should call the next day for the transparencies, and business thus being concluded, he begged modestly to be allowed to stay a few minutes longer. He would so enjoy a little chat about the absent friend ; he had so few opportunities.

" I shall enjoy it too," Lilly responded, inviting him to sit down. " It's a great happiness for me to find someone who knows my fiancé."

The word " fiancé " now fell glibly from her lips as something quite natural. As the chance of his staying longer had been foreseen and provided for, she had only to ring, and Frau Laue appeared in the famous brown velvet gown with the black sequin square décolletage, which was now decorously filled in with one of Lilly's white silk fichus. She bore a tea-tray with two dainty cups of mocha coffee ; and when presented to Herr Dehnicke she made a curtsy, which would have graced a ball at Prince Orloffski's. After she had added a few remarks about the great histrionic artists of the past and the photographs to which they had affixed their autographs at her special request, she retired, as it becomed her to do.

Then Lilly displayed her charms as a hostess, and with the aroma of mocha coffee the spirit of " better days " pervaded everything.

Nearly a week later the post brought Frau Lilly Czepanek a money-order for two hundred and ten marks, from Richard Dehnicke, of the firm of Liebert & Dehnicke, metal-ware craftsmen, " Due for seven landscapes painted on glass, with dried flowers, sold at thirty marks apiece."

Thus the foundation of a future career seemed to be laid.

## CHAPTER V

**B**RIGHT times followed. With part of the sum she had earned, Lilly invested in new materials, and soon more sunsets flared behind woods of dried grass and flowers pasted on glass.

As she lay sleepless, through the hot summer nights, from overwork, she made plans of all the great things she would do when her art had conquered the world. She would have a workshop like Herr Dehnicke's, and employ a dozen women-hands with Frau Laue as forewoman. Then she would advertise for her lost father, and move her poor insane mother to an expensive private asylum.

She would, of course, provide for Walter too. Now that she had worked herself up into imagining herself his fiancée, it would be her duty, and she cheerfully took the responsibility on her shoulders. He must, however, first make some sign, or how was she to know where he was? She felt sure that one day, when he had no one to turn to, he would think of her, and find some way of communicating with her. Then out of her abundance she would send him money without stint, all that her art poured into her lap.

No, not all. She must think first of that great and sacred task which dominated her life with such a gigantic influence. Whether she traced her father or not, his work, his immortal masterpiece, must never be allowed to sink into oblivion. Awaiting its resurrection, the score of "The Song of Songs" still lay slumbering at the bottom of Lilly's locked box, but it slumbered not quite so dreamlessly as in past years. It began to be restive and to exhort, sobbing and humming an accompaniment to the day's work, breaking out in the night and at other times, when one least expected it, into harmonies and melodies.

From over the sunlit, cornflower blue hills it came, as if

wafted by an evening breeze, "How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter!" and from the dark interior of the mythical woods echoed snatches of song concerning the lily of the valleys and the rose of Sharon. It almost seemed as if the invisible inhabitants of those illuminated pasteboard cottages were singing, as evidence of the pleasant lives they led; and so one day would all the people of the earth enjoy those treasures of song, of which fate had appointed her guardian.

Everywhere she went, whatever she might be thinking of or doing, hope smiled and beckoned to her from all corners of the world. A new, more exalted and pure, life must be coming. That golden thread, which her poor mad mother had severed with the bread-knife, became again interwoven with an ambition to climb upwards, ever upwards, and with presentiments of some sacred blessing to be prayed and struggled for.

A few months more, and all might be accomplished; and on the top of this recovered happiness came another. Wonder upon wonder—her so-called future bridegroom suddenly gave a sign of life.

It was early in September, at about twelve, that Herr Dehnicke appeared unannounced at her door. As she had not quite finished dressing she was at first unwilling to admit him. But when he explained that his mission was urgent, she received him, in her *peignoir*, with a thousand apologies. He eyed her with shy admiration, and then drew a folio-shaped, strange-looking piece of paper out of his pocket, which purported to be a cheque drawn on the Lincoln and Ohio Bank for two thousand and odd marks.

"What am I to do with it?" Lilly asked.

"Read the letter, which accompanied it, addressed to me," he replied, unfolding a large sheet.

In the letter "Dear Sir" was informed that Mr. Walter von Prell had paid in five hundred dollars to his account, and wished the sum to be handed over to the "Baroness" Lilly von Mertzbach.

Lilly trembled with excitement. She paced up and down the room in a storm of emotion, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes. She had been planning to help him and now he helped her.

A sudden feeling of suspicion took possession of her. She

stood still and looked at the cheque and then at Herr Dehnicke. Both stood silent.

"I must ask you to explain," she said at length.

"What is there to explain, gracious lady?" he answered. "I am only the middleman, or, if you like it better, the agent, in a little private business that concerns you and your betrothed alone."

"But why couldn't he give his address?" she exclaimed.

"It looks almost as if he wanted to remove all traces of himself," remarked Dehnicke.

It was all so romantic and adventurous and unlike Walter . . . one didn't know what to think.

But there stood the name: "Baroness Lilly von Mertzbach." Walter was possibly ignorant of her having been obliged to renounce her married name. This pointed to the genuineness of the cheque.

Herr Dehnicke had inclined his head to the left side, as usual, and gazed at her with placid deference. He played the part of the middleman, and that was all.

"After this unexpected turn of events," he said in conclusion, "you will, I earnestly believe, no longer hesitate to return to the manner of life suited to your social status, and which is so requisite to the success of your work."

She shook her head, biting her lips.

Thereupon he became authoritative, more so than she would have given such an exceedingly modest person credit for.

"You really must make the change," he urged her. "You must do it for *his* sake. I am, as it were, responsible. When he returns with the intention of marrying you, he must not find that you have become *déclassée* in his absence. As I say, I am responsible."

She begged to be allowed time to think it over.

Henceforth the thought of her distant lover ruled her destiny. What had before been a play of the imagination became almost stern reality. Not that she accepted the story unconditionally of his being at the back of the mysteriously sent cheque. On the contrary, she could not silence a voice that suggested someone might have tricked her, but she could not trust herself to make further inquiries, or to draw conclusions. She dreaded to think what would become of her if she lost the one friend on whom she could at present rely,

and in order to dispel all doubts from her mind she worked more industriously than ever—nearly ever week a fresh batch of sunsets was ready to be taken away. In the mean time Herr Kellermann had given her new ideas : a Gothic cathedral perched on perpendicular rocks, a castle with ever so many illuminated windows, and, greatest achievement of all, the moon shining on a calm grey sea, its silver beams represented by pressed fern-fronds.

On the first Sunday in October, Herr Dehnicke called to take Lilly for a walk. He had done it twice before, and Lilly had been charmed to go. Had he offered to take her into the country she would have liked it still better.

The autumn sunlight lay peacefully on the ragged foliage of the stunted town trees, which had been half bare of leaf for a long time. Groups of people sauntered about aimlessly. They looked depressed and bored, for winter was already laying its nipping fingers on men's spirits.

Their walk took them through various crowded streets, and Lilly experienced the pleasant feeling of having someone to protect and look after her in the throng.

Herr Dehnicke, after a long brooding silence, began at last with the question :

"Have you come to any decision about your future abode, dear lady?"

Lilly did not answer. She was firmly resolved to make no change, and yet it was heavenly to be pressed on the point. It made you feel that you were again of some importance in the world.

"If I had the privilege of selecting for you," he said in his unpretentious, formal way, "I believe I could find you a nook which would be to your taste."

"I don't suppose you could," she replied, half in joke. "We are sure not to have exactly the same tastes."

"I am not so presumptuous as to say that we should. But, nevertheless, I have lately seen a small flat which, unless I am very much mistaken, you would be delighted with. It belongs to a customer, a lady, who is travelling."

"Oh, that's a pity! I should like to have seen it, if only to know what you think my tastes are."

He was lost in thought for a few minutes; then he said, "It can be managed. The maid-servant will not be at home

to-day as it is Sunday ; but the porter's wife, who keeps the key, knows me, and if you like——"

Lilly demurred a little to intruding into a stranger's flat, but Herr Dehnicke overruled her scruples, hailed a cab, and they drove to a westerly quarter of the town, where the houses looked more imposing and the people more distinguished, and where stately chestnuts shading velvety green turf flanked the blue waters of a canal.

" Oh, happy people to live here ! " she exclaimed, and then the carriage drew up at the corner of the Königin-Augusta-Ufer.

Dehnicke jumped out and said a few words at the window of the lodge. A key was handed out, and they ascended the carved oak staircase, which was covered with a thick cherry-coloured carpet. How different from the stone flights of steps which led up to Frau Laue's, and were painful to the feet ! He paused on the second floor, pulled the bell as a matter of politeness—for it might happen that the maid-servant was at home after all—and then, when no one came, put the key in the door and turned it.

Lilly tried to read the name that was engraved on an oval porcelain door-plate, but in the dusk that prevailed on the landing she could not distinguish it.

They entered a very dark little hall smelling of fresh paint, and passed into a carpeted room, on the walls of which were cupboards with glass doors curtained with green silk. The rest of the furniture consisted merely of two armchairs, a few small gilt chairs, and a round, brightly polished dining-table.

" This has been used as a dining-room," said Herr Dehnicke ; " but it would do very well for your private studio and show-room."

Lilly agreed, though she would rather have contradicted him.

Opening out of the dining-room on the right was a bedroom, with Rose du Barri chintz hangings, a pink enamelled suite, and a canopied bed with a billowy silk eider-down quilt, and curtains fastened with an old-gold seven-pointed coronet.

" Is your customer nobly born ? " asked Lilly, feeling vaguely envious.

" I wasn't aware of it," he answered ; " but it's possible she may be."



Lilly sighed a little, recalling her own ivory toilette treasures and her coronet-embroidered underwear lying in Frau Laue's fusty drawers ; how beautifully they would fit in here ! She inhaled with rapture the delicate lilac fragrance that pervaded the whole room like an aristocratic spring, and, shuddering, she compared it with that plebeian smell which, no matter how indefatigably she aired the Dresden treasures, invaded them with deadly persistency.

" Happy woman ! " said Lilly in a low voice.

She rather wondered that the occupant of the flat had left no trace of herself behind—no ribbon, peignoir, or trinket.

" She must have locked up everything, or taken it all away with her," suggested Dehnicke.

Next they went back to the studio, and, passing through its other door, came into a little corner drawing-room, which was completely flooded with rosy sunshine.

Lilly clapped her hands in unbounded delight. There was a soft old-rose carpet with a vine pattern ; a charming little crystal chandelier, the prisms of which set rainbow colours playing on the dark polished mahogany furniture ; and bronze statuettes representing such subjects as a nymph bathing, a reaper folding his hands in prayer at the sound of the Angelus, and so on. Then there were a few choice paintings on the walls, an escritoire, a little bookcase, and there was even a piano.

" Oh ! " sighed Lilly, " a piano ! " And she shut her eyes in sheer melancholy bliss at the thought of it.

There were live things, too. In front of one of the three windows was an aquarium, full of sunlight and goldfish, with a palm overhead ; and from another window chirruped a tame bullfinch.

Lilly thought of her pale-blue silk domain. In comparison with that, what a plain, confined little nest this was ; yet how inexpressibly attractive and cosy when contrasted with the revolting place in which she was dwelling.

" It's a positive paradise ! " she said ecstatically, though half crying.

" Here is another room," said Herr Dehnicke, opening a door that Lilly had not noticed. " It can be entered separately from the hall, and was probably intended by the lady for a guest-chamber ; but if you settled here, it would come in handy as a workroom for your assistants."

Lilly peeped in. The room was more simply arranged than \*

the others, but with considerable care. Greenish-grey upholstered chairs were set round a wide table, and in one corner was a comfortable-looking brass bedstead.

"The bed, of course, could be taken away," Herr Dehnicke explained.

It really was marvellous how exactly suited everything was to her requirements.

They returned to the drawing-room, and Lilly noticed what had before escaped her attention, and that was an almost life-size portrait in an ornate frame hanging above the sofa, as if every other object in the room was there to pay it homage. The features and figure were, however, hidden by a covering of mauve stuff, which made it impossible to recognise them.

"What does that mean?" Lilly asked.

Dehnicke shrugged his shoulders and pointed to a photograph on the *escritoire* veiled in the same mysterious fashion.

Lilly, full of curiosity, took hold of a corner of the drapery which screened the big picture from her view, and raised it a little.

"I wonder if I dare?" she asked timidly, as if she were about to commit a crime.

"Certainly, if you care to," he replied; and it seemed as if he were breathing more heavily than usual.

She tugged, tugged energetically; the drapery fell upon her . . . and there in front of her eyes stood Walter von Prell, boldly sketched in pastel, wearing the uniform of his old regiment. Walter—her friend and fiancé!

Her knees shook. Icy-cold fingers crept through her hair. She refused to understand—to believe. Then she felt that Dehnicke took her hand and led her into the outer hall. He struck a match, and Lilly could now read on the plate the name she had before failed to decipher,

"LILLY CZEPAŃEK.  
PRESSED FLOWER STUDIO."

She gave a shrill cry, rushed back into the little drawing-room, and, burying her face in a corner of the sofa, gave vent to her long-restrained emotions in a burst of hot, blissful tears.

When she looked up again, she saw him standing beside her, unassuming and correct in his bearing, his expression sober and grave.

She was ashamed that she felt so happy, and held out her hand to him in shy gratitude.

" May I venture to hope that in my capacity as Walter's deputy I have succeeded in pleasing you ? " he asked.

After that there was no further question of refusing.

## CHAPTER VI

THE gold-tinted tops of the chestnut-trees faded, and ever wider grew the gaps that autumn's march made in their foliage. At places where a little while ago one saw nothing but a leafy lacework, the ripples of the canal now gleamed through. Along it, heavy barges towed by poles drifted in their laborious fashion, and the shaggy watch-dogs barked up at the windows of distinguished residents. Rainy dull weather stole on the city like a thief in the night, and solitude clutched your heart with its clammy hand.

She had her work, it was true. Her work ! Lilly clung to it day and night, as long as the first infatuation lasted and she could build hopes of realising her ambitious plans.

But the eagerly expected "boom" in painted glass with pressed-flower foregrounds never came. The prospectuses she had printed and sent out were ignored, and Herr Dehnicke, who remained her one patron and purchaser, told her in a hurried and nervous way not to lose heart so soon, as the market was decidedly dull at present.

Gradually her zeal began to wane. She had given up going to Herr Kellermann for lessons, his inopportunities with regard to the release of his "chained Venus" having become too insupportable. She locked her "samples" away in the glass-doored cupboards, and only finished Herr Dehnicke's "orders."

Oh, those cruel, empty days, with no laughter to brighten them and nothing to wait or live for !

In the kitchen a silent young servant held sway. Her eyes had a greedy, far too intelligent expression. The goldfish were fed and given fresh water every morning, and the bullfinch was encouraged to chirp. In the evening, when the chandelier was lighted and radiated its dazzling white light, things were better. Then she would wander from room to room, rearrange

ornaments, and say to herself over and over again that no one ever had been so happy as she was, or had a prettier home.

Of what avail was it all—the soft old-rose carpet with its faint vine-leaf pattern, the red-brown shiny furniture and those bronze figures with their shimmering lustre of gold that were nothing underneath but zinc alloy manufactured by Liebert, Dehnicke & Co.? Of what avail the gold-coroneted note-paper, of which Dehnicke had instantly ordered five hundred sheets, on the neat writing-table? There was no one to rejoice in it all with her, no one whom longing could summon to her side. Often she sat down at the piano and let her fingers wander over the notes. But it was not the pleasure to her she had hoped and expected. The rigorous technical training she had once had under her father's tuition had long ago been forgotten. She could not remember one of the things she used to play by heart, and she lacked the patience and nerve to learn new pieces.

It was strange what a fever of unrest attacked her directly she touched the keys. A fierce anxiety, a sense of terror and inward unworthiness overwhelmed her. She could do nothing else but strike the instrument with a bang, and fly from room to room till her feet ached; and she was glad when ten o'clock called her to bed.

In these unemployed, joyless days there awoke in her a piercing, tormenting desire for man's society, a sweet torture of shuddering thrills. For two whole years her senses had lain dormant. What the colonel's senile corruption had kindled, and the autumn weeks of passion lashed into a blaze, had been drowned by tears of remorse—for ever, she had vainly imagined. But here it was risen again, shaming and enrapturing her together, and refusing to be silenced by prayers and self-reproaches. Often she felt as if she must rush into the streets, if only to meet the eyes of a stranger, as in the Dresden days, and see veiled desire leap up in them. But in the streets people were vulgar and rude, and she shrank trembling from going anywhere alone, except to visit her old landlady.

The walk there took her an hour, and before she reached her former lodging she had been accosted by many ingenuous chance admirers; and many experienced *flâneurs* walked by her side and tried to begin a conversation. She would cross in a hurry to the other side of the street, and wish when she got there that she had spoken to her molesters.

As she lay in bed dreaming with closed eyes, she fancied she saw strong, clear-cut, masculine features hovering round her, into which she looked up with confiding admiration.

She often dreamed too of Herr Dehnicke, the faithful, loyal little business man, who was ready to stand by her so staunchly through thick and thin. Suppose that he were to come to her one day, and in the deprecating, stumbling manner that she had got to like say, "I love you to distraction, and will make you my wife!" What should she say? Every time she contemplated his doing this it brought her a certain sense of comfort.

Of the man who really stood nearest to her, and on whom she had the most claims, she never dreamed. It was true that in her desultory longings those heavenly November nights came back to her vividly, but instead of Walter, any other man might have been their hero. Walter had grown to be a sort of tyrannical ruler over her conscience. Of course, she loved him. How could she help it when he was her destined "bridegroom," working hard for her? Yet often when she stood by the sofa under his portrait, and his cold blue eyes rested upon her with imperious hauteur, she remembered what a scurvy part he had played, and how fickle he had been; and she felt as if she would like to sever every tie that bound her to him, and shake off every thought of him from her like a detestable nightmare.

She wished that Herr Dehnicke would leave off talking of him with devotion and respect, and looking forward to the time when he would have to render account of his modest guardianship of her to his dear friend, on his return in honour and glory to his home and hearth. He came with the utmost punctuality twice a week to see how she was getting on, and to have tea with her. He left in time to be back at his office before it closed. No wonder that Lilly looked on these visits as festivals. He was her only link with the outside world. She had no one but him to bring a little brightness and interest into her life.

She spent hours arranging the tea-table and the lights and flowers for him. For him, too, she stood before the mirror, dressing her hair.

When at last he was sitting opposite her they talked long and seriously about his business worries, his plans, and the trouble he had with artists who thought it a disgrace to

work for the trade, and could only be induced to execute orders when, as it were, he held a pistol to their heads. He spoke of the rivals with whom he competed in business, who built palaces for their workshops in order to dazzle customers, so that he too was forced to transform his good solid old business house into a modern structure with the latest improvements.

His customers too were a source of endless anxiety to him. Some, actuated by the newest ideals in art which were the fashion in the capital, demanded his pandering to the "Secession" movement, and putting on the market long-necked, narrow-hipped bodies in exaggerated attitudes of insane distortion. But the steady public of mediocrity, which was really the purchasing public, would have nothing to say to this trash, and insisted on having knights in armour and their dames in fancy-dress, damsels picking flowers and drawing water, hunted stags and swinging monkeys, the same, in fact, as had been in vogue thirty years before. So he stood, as it were, between two rocks, on one of which he might be wrecked as out of date and old-fashioned, on the other as too advanced and modern. In the latter case he would forfeit most of his old and well-tried patrons. It was extremely difficult to steer a middle course, but it had to be done.

He spoke often, too, of the factory and its hundreds of industrial hands who from early morning till late at night worked for the welfare of the business, and of the alterations which were nearing completion, and which, judging by the architect's designs and the sum which he had spent, ought to be something worth seeing.

"You see what competition compels a man to do," he wound up.

Lilly, with beaming eyes, listened attentively. She took interest in everything. She wanted to hear details of life in the factory with its whirling machinery, clatter of wheels, its hissing furnaces and shrieking files. She never wearied of asking questions about the appearance and behaviour of the workpeople, their wages, their condition, and what became of them afterwards. She felt as if there, in the great hum of the factory, was living reality, while outside her own existence was a shadowy illusion.

"How I envy you," she would exclaim sometimes, "to have so many men's lives in your keeping!"

"They keep you always on the go," he replied; "it's an enormous responsibility and worry."

She was sure he was a benevolent master, even if he would not own it himself. He had such great influence, and his heart was so kind.

He liked to hear her talk like this, though often in the middle of what she was saying he would spring up and walk about the room with excited, short steps, and then stand still in front of her, and stare down on her with gloomy solicitous eyes, as if he could not control his contending emotions.

Lilly appeared to notice nothing, though she knew perfectly well what was passing in his mind at these moments.

"I shall not help him out," she said to herself. "He must do what he likes in his own way, or in future he may cherish resentment towards me." And in palpitating hope she awaited events.

If she could only do away with that ridiculous superstition about Walter, which he probably half believed, like herself, and half bolstered up for the sake of propriety. And then another thing gave her food for reflection. In spite of her often-expressed desire to see the factory, he never volunteered to take her over it. It almost seemed as if he objected to be seen with her on his own premises.

He often talked about his mother, however, and was not shy of confessing how much he was influenced by her, though he made it plain that he would prefer to have more freedom to carry out his schemes and develop his powers.

When his father died—twelve years before—he had not been of age, and had been obliged to submit to his mother's rule. The old lady's régime continued, and every new enterprise was discussed with her, and if she approved it was put into execution, even if he were opposed to it. Lilly felt awaking within her a dull aching terror of the old lady who lived behind the bourgeois flower-pots and issued commands from her armchair, which were obeyed by so great a man as her benefactor. She pictured the moment of making her acquaintance with a sinking heart.

Towards Christmas she was again busy. Two dozen new designs for windows had been ordered, and must be finished before the festive day. A future seemed once more to open before her. For the first time in four years she forgot to



send her mother's Christmas present to the asylum. Instead, she made Herr Dehnicke's mother a particularly "poetic" lamp-shade, and sent it anonymously to the house on the morning of Christmas Eve. Why she did it, she did not know herself. Perhaps it was a propitiatory offering such as nervous souls were in the habit of making of old to unknown gods for unknown offences. She had made a little pile of gifts for her friend, though uncertain that he would turn up, and she listened for his ring with a beating heart. Her fears were groundless, for at half-past five he appeared, in the twilight of the hall, as loaded with parcels as old Father Christmas himself!

He had selected them with tact and discretion. There were little things that she wanted for domestic use in the flat, a set of embroidered collars, Persian lamb boa—to save her sables—a few trifles from the factory to adorn the still bare top of her *escritoire*. At every exclamation of delight she gave he modestly disclaimed thanks. Everything came, as she knew, from Walter.

"And is there nothing from you?" she asked.

"Nothing!" he replied, and turned his palms outwards.

"Well then," she said, "if you'd like to know, there is something you can give me that Walter can't."

"What can that be?" he asked

"Take me over your factory."

This time he did not put her off, but fixed a definite day and hour. It should be the first working-day after the new year, when everything would be in full swing again. "Please wear something dark and plain," he added, when it was settled.

"Am I generally dressed loudly?" asked Lilly, horrified. She felt as if someone had boxed her ears.

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" he stammered in confusion; "but you might hurt your good clothes."

At noon on January 2nd she stood in front of the house in Alte Jakobstrasse, which she hadn't seen since her first memorable visit. "After all," she reflected, "it did prove a path of fate in one way." She looked up stealthily at the porcelain flower-pots on the first floor, and started, for she fancied she saw a white head move behind the lace curtains. "That's what comes of having a guilty conscience,"

she thought, and with a shy sidelong glance of awe she passed the door that led to the laurel-flanked private staircase, which her feet were not worthy to tread till she was again received into the bosom of middle-class respectability.

The other entrance stood hospitably open. The scaffolding had been taken down, walls and pillars gleamed in the mirror-like glory of imitation marble, and the splendour of the courtyard beyond made her feel diffident again. By this time even the grimy old office had been transformed. It now boasted a projecting façade of sandstone, with the busts of famous artists in the niches. The ascent of worn and rickety wooden steps had been replaced by a gorgeous gilded gateway.

Her friend hurried down to meet her, bareheaded, in spite of the biting cold. As he held out his hand in welcome, he cast a furtive searching glance up at the windows. It looked almost as if he too were troubled by a guilty conscience.

He led her first into the show-room. Its brand-new smartness exceeded her expectations. Pillared aisles with vaulted ceilings made it look like a museum. There were interminable avenues of tables and cases, sending forth the sparkle of gold and silver and prismatic hues, the warm glow of deep-red copper fading into the pale green of patina, from hundreds of works of art—products of German industry, those so-called "bronzes," which were to be displayed in shop-windows all over the country, and endow even the cottages of the poor with an air of prosperity.

The subjects included, among others, fat monks and lean beggars, dancing gipsy-girls with tambourines, elegant young men with eyeglasses, postillions blowing horns, chickens picking corn, and hounds retrieving game. There were calendars set in horse-shoes, cigar-clips shaped like champagne bottles, pelicans three feet tall holding aloft lamps in their bills; fancy figures, both male and female, stretching out arms as they had done in Herr Kellermann's studio, but not without reason here, for they all held up vases, candelabra, or basins. Arbours screened loving pairs, and had red electric bulbs hidden in the foliage, goblins sat astride on mushrooms; sea-shells served the purpose of ash-trays; punch-bowls, antique cream-jugs, night-light holders, snakes coiled round flower-stems or china ducks-eggs. The whole gamut of vulgarity and poverty in artistic invention seemed herded

together here, ready to be let loose in rampant distribution over all the four quarters of the globe.

When Lilly gave her friend an inquiring or mystified look now and again, as she examined some monstrosity, he shrugged his shoulders and remarked, "That is what the public likes."

In spite of a feeling of being jarred, Lilly would not have minded spending hours amidst this glitter. She would have been in her element if her judgment had been appealed to, and she would have said unhesitatingly, "That is bad, weed it out; throw that away, and that . . . and this too." But no one asked her opinion, and everything seemed to get on very well without it.

Her friend next took her across to the factory. Unfortunately the foundry, which was the first stage and basis of all the work turned out, happened to be temporarily closed. But Lilly saw through an open window the black yawning throats of the furnaces and the dirty trucks standing about. Everything was covered with a mist of grey ash—the chimney-pieces, casks, and utensils all seemed to float in the same impenetrable sea of ashen greyness.

They went down some dirty steps and passed through damp cellars smelling of poisonous chemicals, where huge vats containing foul fluids were ranged. Men prematurely aged by work and disease hovered about here looking like ascetic phantoms, when they were only common labourers. As Lilly came in they gave her a quick glance of surprise, and then didn't trouble to look again. They had no greeting for their employer.

"This is the galvanic department," explained Herr Dehnicke. "Here is the nickel-plate bath, the steel bath, the quicksilver, and so on."

He pointed to a loft surrounded by an iron crate, where the wheels of a machine whirled and the light of electric lamps gleamed.

"There the current is generated which galvanises the various baths," he said.

Lilly did not understand, but she took pleasure in the rapid whirl of the wheels and the subdued buzz which they made as they spun round.

"There will be some that whirl more madly still," she thought, and expected to hear, when the next door was opened,

a deafening thunder. But nothing of the sort happened. This was the one machine in the whole factory to provide her with entertainment.

In the workroom where the chiselling was done, dozens of men stood at long tables, levelling the uneven surface of the cast metal, and making the separate parts of an ornament ready for joining. This was done in the room adjacent, where the flames of the blowpipes leapt and hissed, and clouds of metallic vapour shot up sparks. Each workman had a little pile of burnished arms and legs beside him that looked as if they had been amputated and had left the body they belonged to behind.

Then they came to the "filigree" department, where all the flowers and foliage were elaborated—the ribbons, tendrils, and arabesques, everything of a light, curly, and daintily twining character. So delicate was the work that it made the men engaged on it look all the clumsier and coarser. They scarcely raised their eyes, and hammered on in a dogged mechanical way.

Lilly, wherever she went, had a keener eye for the appearance and manner of the workpeople than for the work itself. She drew comparisons inwardly, decided who was well-to-do and who the reverse, who pursued his avocation because he liked it, and who only because he was goaded to it by necessity and sickness at home. Each department had its own marked physiognomy. In one the majority would be fresh and active; in another, weary and exhausted. Lilly felt as she had done when Herr Dehnicke first told her about his workpeople: an insane desire to have the wielding of their fate in her hands, to help them when help was needed, to bring sunshine into their gloomy lives, and to be a good angel to the suffering. But she was careful not to confide her absurd notions to Herr Dehnicke.

"Now we come to the most critical part of the business," he said, "the patina application, which gives the figures their style."

He opened the door of a workshop which exhaled the odour of a thousand more poisons. Here women were at work with the men, putting on varnish and acids, rubbing and brushing busily. They looked haggard and tired out. At the sight of Lilly they dropped their implements to stare at her in blank amazement.

"One would have to begin here," she thought, "to win the confidence of all." So she nodded at them pleasantly and spoke a few friendly words. But her little advances were wrongly interpreted. They thought she mocked them, and with an almost contemptuous grimace went back to their work.

Lilly's appearance in the packing-room, where women and children alone were employed, produced a happier impression. The girls giggled, whispered, and nudged each other. Only one woman, who was *enceinte*, took no notice of her. She seemed hardly able to stand on her feet and was near to sinking on the floor. She kept her relaxed pale lips tightly compressed, her cheeks wore a hectic flush, and her arms moved in feverish zeal as she wrapped one sheet of paper after the other round the limbs of the figures standing before her on the table, swaying first to the right and then to the left under her touch.

"May I give her something?" asked Lilly, in an aside to Herr Dehnicke.

"She is being looked after," he answered uneasily, as if displeased, and he quickly led the way to another door.

"This is where the figures are stored," he said, "until sold, with the exception of those, naturally, that are made to order."

Lilly looked down a long dusky gallery and met an icy-cold draught. Ranged on stands and shelves she saw endless regiments of ghostly objects, dwarfs, gnomes, monsters, shapeless in their wrappings of paper, yet looking somehow human, and as if they had been petrified by accident.

"How strange this is!" said Lilly with a slight shiver, and she prepared to walk down the narrow gangway, the windows of which were covered with ice and frost-patterns.

The same moment she observed that her guide gave a start and seemed suddenly to have lost his presence of mind. Then he walked before her and barred the way.

"What has happened?" Lilly asked in surprise.

He coloured, and said: "We had better not go on. We'll go somewhere where there's more of interest to see. There's nothing at all here."

He planted himself firmly in front of her so that Lilly could not catch a glimpse of the shelves along the wall. Of course, this completely aroused her curiosity.

"But I should like to go on," she said, and she assumed the defiant naughty manner which generally gained her the day with him.

"No, no!" he exclaimed hurriedly. "There are secrets of business here that I can reveal to no one. Even the employes are not allowed to come in. I am very sorry, but I really cannot."

"Then you should not have brought me in at all," said Lilly, and she turned back in high dudgeon.

He exhausted every excuse he could think of, his excitement made him hoarse, and he coughed perpetually. He led her up the dirty steps again and over the gorgeous mosaic floor of the courtyard to the shoddy marble entrance, where a bitter wind was blowing.

"You'll catch cold," she said, wishing to hasten her departure.

A brilliant idea occurred to him. "The storeroom was not heated," he said, "so I could not——"

"You should have thought of that sooner," Lilly retorted, as she gave him her hand with a half-conciliating smile. She could not help pitying his helpless confusion.

Nevertheless, she continued to feel hurt and slightly perturbed. The day that she had joyfully looked forward to for months had ended with a *contretemps*. And no matter how earnestly she pressed him afterwards, she never could cajole Herr Dehnicke into unveiling the mystery of that forbidden room in his warehouse.

## CHAPTER VII

LILLY'S health began to decline. She was troubled with lassitude, headache, palpitations, and sleepless nights. The doctor called in at Herr Dehnicke's instigation was a busy practitioner, who went the round of innumerable houses every day. His eyes first took in the arrangements of the flat—he seemed familiar with the setting—then after a brief and cursory diagnosis, he prescribed social distractions, exercise, and iron—any quantity of iron.

Social distractions were out of the question, and even walks were not so easy to manage. Lilly had a distaste for strolling about alone, and her only escort, Herr Dehnicke, evidently did not care to be seen too often with her in the streets. He said he did not wish to compromise her; but if the real reason was known, it was probably that he did not care to make himself too conspicuous by appearing in public with a companion whose beauty was so striking and uncommon.

For, whatever happened to her, in spite of all her heavy sorrows and degrading humiliations, her boredom and unsatisfied cravings, nothing detracted from the charm of her person. On the contrary, the soft milky paleness which had succeeded the healthy golden-brown tint of her complexion lent her a new loveliness. The great narrow, long-lashed eyes with the heavy drooping lids, those enigmatic "Lilly eyes," had now acquired a weary, languishing brilliance, as if they hid in their depths a solution to all the painful problems of the universe. Her figure, too, had returned to the regal splendour of its girlhood's bloom, after having become too slight and thereby losing some of its reposeful stateliness.

It was not astonishing, then, that many heads were turned to look back at her and her lucky companion who, being shorter than she was, provoked a kind of contempt as well

as envy in the breast of the casual passer-by. And as he was fully aware of this, Herr Dehnicke, the astute man of business, to whom the idea of being the subject of gossip was not pleasing or advantageous, preferred to hold his *tête-à-tête* with her indoors.

In the middle of February she received by post an invitation from Herr Kellermann, whom she had not seen for months.

" GRAND STUDIO CARNIVAL

" Living Pictures, Opportunities for Flirtation, etc "

Here at last was something that promised to be entertaining, and Herr Dehnicke, who chanced to be invited too, urged her to conquer her shyness and accept.

When the day came, Lilly was so full of dread that she would gladly have got out of the engagement. She beheld herself running the gauntlet of a crowd of sneering strangers, who would exchange significant glances with each other at her expense, and narrate the history of her rise and fall in whispers. She saw herself given the cold shoulder and made the object of derisive remark. She went through all the tortures of the " unclassed," and felt as if she were doomed to bear the brand of sin on her brow till the end of her days.

She selected from her Dresden gowns the loveliest that she possessed: a white silk embroidered with gold vine-leaves and made in the Empire style, which in the meantime had become the height of fashion. She wound a gold chain round her head like a diadem, and threw a filmy Oriental richly worked veil lightly over her hair. If necessity arose, she could use it as a covering for her bare neck and shoulders. Finally, she felt sure that she looked hideous and abominably *outré*, and that this alone was sufficient ground for not showing herself.

Only when her escort appeared and held on to the handle of the door with an astounded exclamation, at the sight of her in evening dress, did she take heart.

" Shall I do ? " she asked with a timid smile, which implored approval.

He could not answer, but plunged about the room breathing heavily, and half choking over his incoherent words. Lilly had no difficulty in understanding what he wanted to say.

In the *coupé*, as she sat beside him, another attack of terror seized her.



" You promise not to leave me ? " she besought him. " You'll stay with me all the time, won't you, and not allow any stranger to speak to me ? "

He promised everything. They went up the four flights of stairs, an ascent she was familiar with. The landing had been turned into a ladies' cloak-room, where were hanging imposing furs and lace evening coats that humbled you to the dust to look at.

She clung to his arm. " Now I'm in for it," she thought.

The big ante-room, which was always dark in the daytime and used as kitchen, bedroom, and dining-room by Herr Kellermann, had been transformed with fir-trees and candles into a rose-lit, fairy-tale forest, in which couples sat close together on bamboo seats, smiling and whispering. They were so absorbed in each other that they had no attention to spare for the new-comers.

A tremendous reception awaited Lilly in the studio itself, which was filled with a brilliant, glittering throng. There was a chorus of " Ah ! " then profound stillness, and a path was made, down which the pair seemed expected to make a triumphal progress. Lilly tried to hide behind her companion, but as he only came up to her nose she did not succeed.

Then Herr Kellermann hurried forward to welcome them. He was in a brown velvet get-up, consisting of knee-breeches, lounge-jacket, and Phrygian cap. Most of the company, indeed, seemed to be dressed in anything that they thought specially original and becoming to their style of beauty.

" Goddess, Queen, welcome ! " cried the host in a voice for everyone to hear, and then he fell to kissing her gloved hand from wrist to elbow.

Next he asked to be allowed to take her round and show her how excellent were the arrangements of his new Court of Love. And she followed him, after warning her friend not to go far away, but to be within hail.

Electric lamps had been hung in the open air directly over the skylight, converting it into a many coloured, star-studded sky. On looking up the effect was really as if a thousand tiny suns were shining down out of the night. On the left gable-side of the room, where the roof sloped, was an evergreen trellis draped with rugs and divided into several little arbours, before which hung curtains of Japanese beads. Each of these was significantly placarded.

The first was called something which made Lilly turn a shocked look of inquiry at her guide. Whereupon he replied, smiling :

" That's nothing, merely a beginning for flappers and afternoon-tea souls like you. What do you say to this, now ? " he added, pointing to the placard over the next arbour.

" Dreadfully wicked ! " she exclaimed, really scandalised, and Kellermann shook with laughter. He read aloud to her the inscriptions over four more arbours, and at every one Lilly's cheeks grew hotter. " Worse and worse," she thought, but said nothing.

" Now I will take you over to the ' Criminal Side,' " he said, and steered her through the crush, which set up a hum at her reappearance. But it was devoid of all envy, hatred, and malice. It was rather an ovation, a suppressed cheering. Her breast expanded. A slight, humble sensation of joy crept through her body like warm wine. She threw back the ends of her tinsel veil, feeling she no longer need be ashamed of her naked throat and shoulders. In the glances that met hers she read that no one would despise her.

She did not reach the " Criminal Side," for there were so many interruptions by the way. Man after man wanted to be introduced to her, and Herr Kellermann was fully occupied in saying their names. From this moment the whole carnival became perfectly unreal, a dreamland, a fairyland meadow, in which large-eyed flowers bloomed, where rosy mists and heavy perfumes saturated the senses, where laughter, whispering, and unheard-of compliments mingled—where all only existed for her amusement, to be admired, petted, and loved by her.

Yes, and she did love them all, these men and women, just as they came. All of them were noble and good, sparkling with merry wit, full of eagerness to do little friendly services ; golden souls, each awaking a new hope and bringing a new delight.

She felt her cheeks flaming, her eyes shining, with the intoxication of the hour. And now and then she would see, as if reflected in a mirror, a response to her own happiness in the eyes she looked into. This was no longer a strange Lilly, an animated puppet, but it was herself, the real Lilly, who laughed and made bright repartees as she romped and passed from arm to arm, feeling regret at each transition. This was

herself—twofold, threefold herself. And, when sometimes the man with whom she conversed became too bold, and the *double entendre* behind his jokes transgressed the bounds of decency, so that she grew alarmed, she had only to turn round to find her friend somewhere near, ever ready to rescue her from an awkward situation. That gave her a truly blissful sense of security, a feeling of being hidden under a wing and taken care of, so that she could afford to be merrier still—even hilarious—and take the most audacious sallies in good par..

Once she heard behind her the question: "Whose mistress is she? The lucky dog!"

The answer came contemptuously: "A little polisher, or something of the kind. He's over there."

For a moment this speech gave her food for reflection, though how could she possibly be supposed to know to whom it referred? In the excitement, the incident soon passed from her mind.

What lots of people she got to know!

There were young fops in swallow-tails and white brocaded silk waistcoats, who paid her wild attention, and asked incidentally though with patent eagerness which day in the week was her "*jour*" for receiving. She was sorry to say she hadn't a day, she lived so very quietly.

There were sombre pessimists with long lank hair and enormous ties, who loved to converse on such topics as "spiritual high-pressure," "specific gravity of individual affinities," and it did Lilly's soul good to hear them. One of them addressed her as "Excellency," and when she asked why he did, he seemed amazed, and stuttered he had heard that she was—Then, quickly correcting himself, he turned it off with the wretched joke that as she excelled all women present, he could not think of a more fitting form of address.

There was among others a well-preserved old man, a fast liver, whose signature Lilly had read with reverence on many a beautiful picture. It would have given her greater pleasure to kiss his hand than to have him dancing round her, aping youthful gallantry.

There were many others who aroused her curiosity, but whose rank and character she could not learn. There was even a real prince, a pale, fair, extremely young fellow, who dared not ask to be introduced to Lilly because his mistress

kept guard on him and would not let him out of her sight. The women, of course, were not so gushing to her as the men, though the one or two whose acquaintance she made were very warm in their overtures of friendship.

A brunette, with a small, voluptuously beautiful figure, bright restless eyes, and a seductive smile, approached her with: "You and I ought to be friends. I'll introduce you to my particular pal, and we'll have supper together at a little table, and be quite a cosy family party."

Another, a very thin young girl, taller than most of the men present, with wells of blue fire for eyes, swept about in long white "impressionist" draperies like a figure in a dream, undisturbed by the tumult in which she moved. She spoke without moving her head, and smiled without curving her lips. She was a fair young Dane, who had come to study painting and to "live life," as she expressed it.

"Who are you?" she asked Lilly. "You are different from the rest. You must have strong arms, if you do not want to be washed along by the current."

With a bold gesture, she flung back the wide sleeves of her gown, and displayed two marble-white perfect arms, with wonderfully supple movements. Then she glided on.

A flaxen-haired, extremely graceful woman, no longer young, whose pretty, laughing face was burnt as brown as a berry from exposure to sun and wind, held out her hand to Lilly with a merry twinkle in her eye, as if they had known each other for years.

"How sweet you are, and how beautiful!" she said softly. "We've all flown into this cage and don't know why; and we don't even know whether we shall get out unhurt or not. But where do you hail from? I am——" She mentioned the name—the name of a great musician who in the house of Kilian Czepanek had been a kind of demi-god.

"Yes, I am Welter's former wife. . . . Positively I am," she added gaily, and again took the arm of the man she was with and turned away.

"A sort of '*Generalin*,' like me," thought Lilly.

There were thrown in a few married couples, mostly very young and foolish, who herded for a long time timidly together and then frisked wildly about like monkeys let loose.

One pair, however, seemed to have been invited as a

practical joke. The husband was a thorough-paced beery Philistine, his spouse a fat, stolid person in a high black silk. Someone told Lilly that he was the landlord of the house, who was bribed by an invitation to the carnival to countenance the use of his top floor for such a purpose. The two, to all appearances, were not feeling at all *de trop*, and always found a laughing audience for their coarsest jokes.

Towards ten o'clock, when Lilly was deep in an abstruse discussion with one of the long-haired and unwashed guests on the fallibility of human values, a sudden howl was raised, first by one throat and then by another, till it swelled to a chorus; the words "hungry" and "food" alone were to be distinguished.

Herr Kellermann's voice was raised in soothing remonstrance above the clamour. The slices of bread-and-dripping which the guests were to be given for supper—a poor devil of a painter could not rise to anything more *recherché*—were not quite ready. Meanwhile, would the ladies and gentlemen kindly be patient? Those who were absolutely starving might, however, still their hunger by a visit to the "Poison" arbour, where they could obtain as many arsenic sandwiches and prussic acid tartlets as they liked.

The whole mass of human beings now made a rush for the "Criminal Side," where, in order to play at "*crimes passionnels*," a complete arsenal of deadly weapons had been collected. Gallows were suspended from the glass ceiling, ladders led down to bottomless pits, and cannons went off. The company greedily snatched the poisoned viands, and people who didn't even know each other took bites out of the same sandwich.

The supper itself soon followed. Under the fir trees of the ante-room a buffet was erected, piled with mountains of York hams, cold game-pies, lobster salads, mayonnaise salmon, and every conceivable savoury waiting an assault. The assault when it came was so furious that though the buffet, which was planted against a wall, resisted it, the forest of fir-trees collapsed—branches snapped off, trunks cracked, twigs flew about, and among the *débris* waltzed a crush of laughing, swearing revellers.

Then the brilliant idea occurred to someone to hurl the whole forest downstairs to the next floor. The Chinese lanterns were put out, and soon the uprooted firs were flying over the

stairs tree after tree, in spite of the protests of the landlord, who was afraid of his other tenants being disturbed by the noise. The ladies' light dresses were covered with pine-needles, and pine-needles stuck in their hair and necklaces. Everything smelt of Christmas. It was difficult to eat for laughing, and there were not tables and chairs enough to go round. To balance their plates, couples crouched closely together on the stairs, and supplies kept dangling down on them from the buffet above. Some venturesome spirits even climbed the trees and roosted like birds in the branches, while food was handed up to them on the end of forks and walking-sticks by charitable souls.

Lilly, half-dead from laughing, was seated on one of the stairs surrounded by unknown men, all of whom craved to be fed by her. She had never been so happy in her life, and would have liked it to last for ever ; her only care was that all the men she was feeding wouldn't get enough.

At the conclusion of the supper came the *pièce de résistance* in the shape of cream kisses. They were swung through the air hooked to the end of long fishing-rods, and every guest had to try and catch his or her share with the mouth. Hands were forbidden, and those who used them were rapped on the knuckles.

This sport, which at first excited tornadoes of mad glee, had soon to be abandoned, because the whipped cream dropped from its cases on to the ladies' necks and dresses. Lilly's Empire gown got its baptism of cream, and one of the men on his knees kissed away the stains.

When a trumpet sounded, to call the revellers back to the studio, everyone was sorry, especially Lilly.

It consoled her to catch sight again of her friend, whom she had entirely forgotten. Leaning on his arm, she related, with a radiant face and half-inarticulate from laughter, her merry experiences.

It was then she noticed that the eyes of all those who were near seemed bent on her with a strange seriousness and as if moved to sudden compassion. But she was too busy talking to think much about it. She begged him to stay at her side when the recitations began. She was tired of playing the fool, she said, and wanted now something homelike.

He gave her arm a grateful pressure.

"Why are you trembling?" she asked him in astonishment.

"It's nothing," he answered lightly.

The first reciter was one of the long-haired collarless brigade, who had been asked to open the programme with a solemn and weighty chorale.

He declaimed an ode entitled "Super-smoke," which was Greek to Lilly, but she supposed it was very fine, because at the end there was an outbreak of stormy applause among the men.

"Bravo, bravo! Super-smoke, more Super-smoke!" they shouted.

The long-haired collarless one, who took this for an encore, bowed, highly flattered, and started off again: "Super-smoke, an ode." But he got no further. Roars of "That's enough! that's enough!" came from all sides, and it appeared that the men had been only expressing a desire for something smokable when they had called out "More Super-smoke."

The next to appear on the rostrum was a slender, exceedingly elegant person with a short pointed brown beard and glittering monocle. He was a Dr. Salmoni, to whom Lilly had been introduced. With a melancholy smile he held his hand close to his nose and examined his finger-nails, as he said that it was his purpose to draw up an intellectual synopsis of the evening's entertainment, and to throw in a few remarks on the "destructive construction of social formlessness."

This prefaced a volley of impertinent sarcasms and insulting personalities, intended to annihilate host and guests. Though she could not understand his hits, Lilly felt inclined to blush for those who came under the fire of his scathing satire. Yet, extraordinary to relate, no one seemed to mind; on the contrary, the very people who were being lashed by his tongue the most were loudest in jubilant applause.

"Happy world!" thought Lilly, "where nothing hurts, and the most abominable sins are titles to honour."

Her own false step, from which she had so long suffered as from a poisoned wound, suddenly appeared to her in the light of a mere childish prank. "Wasn't it very silly of me to take it so to heart?" she thought, and gave herself a downward stroke with her two hands, as if she would thereby shake off every vestige of her old manacles.

The elegant little doctor knew, too, how to flatter. Each fair lady got from him her bonbon, spiced with pepper, and when he went on to speak of a lotus-flower that had drifted

there this evening, from fairyland, and still seemed shy of the full glare of publicity being thrown on her, Lilly again became conscious that she attracted every eye.

"Let her take courage," he went on. "She may count on any of us, I'll assert, to welcome night dreamily in her company if she wants someone."

Enthusiastic clapping from the men endorsed this speech, and Lilly did not feel a bit ashamed.

When Dr. Salmoni had finished and was shaken hands with and congratulated by all, especially those who had bled most under his lash, he came up to Lilly and said in a low voice :

"I pray for your forgiveness, gracious lady, for having named you in the same breath as this herd. There ought to be a tacit understanding between people of our position, without the necessity of making advances to each other. But I was sick of just cracking a whip, and you know I am not always a mountebank."

"People in our position," he had said. That flattered Lilly, and raised her to the same level as this very clever and superior man, who, as he put his eyeglass away in his waistcoat pocket, regarded her with his sharp grey eyes as if he wanted to tear her heart to tatters.

A swarthy youth of mercurial temperament next sang couplets to his own accompaniment on the mandoline. He began with the romantic air of a troubadour.

The third verse, which ended in French, was so daringly outspoken that Lilly hardly ventured to understand it.

The song was received with such ecstasy that it seemed as if the applause would never stop. Lilly wondered that she felt so little disgusted. Nothing seemed to disgust her any more. Her eyes half closed, she leaned back in her chair and let lights, sounds, obscenities, laughter and cheers ripple over her as in a dream.

From time to time she looked round for her escort. He was standing close behind her chair, smiling reassuringly. But he kept silent. A red patch burned on his forehead and his eyes were bloodshot. It may have been that he had drunk too much champagne. She herself had only sipped a glass, but her head felt quite dizzy.

The songs and recitations came to an end at two o'clock, and now the fun waxed fast and furious and transgressed all limits. Everyone tussled, kissed, drank, picked quarrels, and



fought duels. Lovers pretended to stab themselves and were carried out lifeless. The cannons fired off crackers. Outside the different harbours orations were held by various guests. One by a dainty youth in a Greek costume hired from a paid model, delivered in a high falsetto, dealt with pseudo-physiological problems. Into the arbour of "Monstrosities" someone had pushed the beery Philistine landlord and his corpulent wife, where they kissed and caressed each other to order, in full view of the company, who applauded vociferously.

Lilly's head went round ; it all buzzed, screeched, and hammered in her brain like an agonising nightmare.

"We had better go now," Herr Dehnicke's voice urged behind her.

She rose to her feet and stretched herself with a shudder.

This had been life, life —

She followed him out, and at the top of the stairs Herr Kellermann, who had observed their going, came running after them. His collar hung open and limp above his velvet lounge-jacket, his cheeks were glazed and puffy. He looked like a young Falstaff.

He exchanged a glance with Dehnicke, who nodded as much as to say, "It went off very well," and then disappeared in search of her wraps.

"And how about the chained beauty?" asked Herr Kellermann, turning to Lilly. "Have you quite forgotten her?"

"Quite," replied Lilly, with a languid smile.

"And you'll never come?"

"Never!"

"But I tell you that you will come," he said, leading her to the side of the staircase. "You will come when the chains have cut into your flesh and you don't know——"

Dehnicke returned with the wraps, and he said no more.

Lilly was in far too happy and complacent a mood to attribute any significance to these words, which in the mouth of this bacchic faun sounded like a joke. She simply laughed at him and passed on.

Her excited brain quieted down ; she leaned against her friend's shoulder as they descended the stairs, airily swung her hips, and hummed to herself. The whole world seemed melting in a soft fragrant harmonious twilight. Fresh snow had fallen and the moon was shining.

Dehnicke's carriage was waiting for them.

"Let us drive to the Tiergarten," said Lilly, drinking in her fill of the snow-laden air.

She threw herself back on the cushions of the *coupé*, sang and beat time with her feet on the floor.

He sat silently in his corner and looked out of the window.

"Do say something," she implored.

"I have nothing to say," he said, and studiously looked beyond her with his red, bleary eyes.

The carriage rolled noiselessly along under the snow-covered trees, which every now and then sent down a shower of silvery stars on to their laps.

A drowsy lethargy came over her.

"I should like to drive on like this for ever," she whispered, seeking a support for her head.

Then it seemed suddenly as if Walter's arm was round her waist and as if her left cheek rested against Walter's throat, as once in those blissful November nights.

But how did Walter come here now? She started up, wide awake again.

This was not Walter beside her. She was under no delusion as to who it was. She was ashamed to change her position, and lay with wide-open eyes for quite a long time, listening to the beating of his heart—how it beat, right up his arm!

"He will not demand the price which it is customary with our compatriots to ask of pretty women," Walter had written.

Now here he was demanding it with all his might.

With what contempt Walter would look down from his picture at her when she stepped into the lamplight of her corner drawing-room half an hour later! Walter who passed with everyone as her betrothed, even with this man into whose arms she had slipped, Walter, to whom she must be faithful and true if she hoped for salvation in this life.

It was really heavenly, nevertheless, to be lying thus. She felt as if she belonged somewhere again, and how terrible her loneliness had been! Still, it was no good.

So she moved cautiously, as if she was afraid of hurting him, and freed herself from his arm, to take refuge against the side cushions.

"Why don't you stay?" he asked, stammering like an inebriated man. "Weren't you feeling comfortable?"

She shook her head.

He went on asking her with passionate vehemence, but she would not answer, feeling that every word she spoke would commit her still further.

Then he caught her hand, that hung down passively, and pressed it.

"I mayn't," she whispered, withdrawing her hand. "Neither may you."

"Why mayn't we?"

"Because you would bitterly regret it afterward when you had to render account to him, if you had abused your trust."

"Him! Whom do you mean?"

"Whom?" she echoed. "Why, whom else could I mean? . . . Haven't you said a hundred times that you are only his deputy, that you——"

A laugh interrupted her, a hoarse guilty laugh. He had clasped his hands round his knees, and laughed and breathed deeply and laughed again, like someone relieved from an intolerable burden.

A horrible dread gradually became a certainty within her.

"It was all untrue?" she faltered, staring at him.

"All! It was all nonsense from beginning to end, a tissue of humbug," he cried. "He wrote to me once, only once, before he left Germany. 'Take up with her; it would be a pity if she went to the dogs.' Nothing more, not another word. . . . There, now you know. . . . I've got it off my mind. It's been a jolly heavy load, I can tell you. . . . But what was I to do? Having begun, I had to go on."

He flung up the window and leaned out, panting hard.

She wanted to ask why he had done it. But she didn't dare. She knew what the answer must be. One thing stood out with appalling distinctness, and that was her helplessness and utter inability to save herself. She was putting herself in his hands. She was living in his flat, living on his money. She looked at the situation from his point of view. She was what he had designed she should be—his mistress, his creature, and his property.

Oh, why couldn't she throw herself into the river?

She wrenched open the carriage door and put one foot on the step, but he dragged her back and slammed the door to.

"Be reasonable," he remonstrated. "Don't behave like a madwoman."

Then she burst out crying. Not since the time of her divorce

had her sobs been so pitiful, so heart-broken and full of bitterness. At intervals his voice seemed to reach her from a long way off, but she could hear nothing, see nothing, understand nothing. She could only cry, cry ; as if in crying lay salvation, as if trouble and distress would flee away with her tears.

The carriage stopped. She felt herself lifted out. He had the latch-key in his pocket. Supported by him, she staggered up the stairs, and thought to herself over and over again, "Why didn't you throw yourself into the river?"

He led her to the sofa, settled her in its corner, and turned on the lights. Then he loosened the fastenings of her cloak, and lifted the scarf from her hair.

She lay now in a state of complete exhaustion, and stared indifferently at the table-cloth. The little bullfinch was awake and piped her a welcome.

"It is getting late," she heard Herr Dehnicke say, "and the carriage is waiting. But I cannot go till I have justified my conduct and explained how it has all happened."

"That really makes no difference to me," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"I loved you long before," he began—"long before I knew you—when you were still our colonel's wife."

She looked up in surprise. As he stood there in his short tight evening coat, plucking nervously at the fringe of the table-cover with the joyless, beseeching expression on his round face, master though he was, she felt as if she saw him for the first time.

"I was called out that summer for the manoeuvres," he continued, "and heard nothing else talked about at the Casino but you. Even the ladies of the regiment were full of you. Your photographs were passed round, for some of the men snapped you on the sly. . . . I recognised you at once from the photographs. Yes, I can truthfully assert that I loved you then. What's more, after Prel's letter told me that you were to come into my life, what plans for winning you didn't I work out in that year and a half! Then at last you turned up at my warehouse, and you exceeded my wildest expectations. But I lost hope when I saw what a great lady you had become, and how much you still thought of Walter. Though I know I am not a bad fellow, I haven't much self-confidence, and to have you for a mistress seemed too great luck to be dreamed of."

Now that he came out with the word "mistress" for the first time, an intense bitterness welled up within her.

"To have me for a wife," she thought, "that is something not to be dreamed of, evidently." And she laughed out loud.

He took her laugh as a sign that she was too modest to accept his compliment, and he worked himself up into still greater enthusiasm.

Did she think that any of the women in whose society they had been that evening were worthy to lick her shoes? Had she no conception of how immeasurably she outshone everything that bore the name of woman?

Then from her tearful eyes came the question that pride and shame prevented her expressing in words. This time he must have understood for he suddenly broke off in what he was saying, clasped his hands to his head, and ran up and down the room half sobbing. She heard him ejaculate: "Can't . . . I can't . . . it wouldn't do."

"Well, if he can't, he can't," she thought, and, with her face resting on her palms, she stared at him wistfully.

He came now and stood in front of her, struggled to speak, but choked over his words, and then he resumed his racing up and down the room. She caught phrases like, "My mother . . . would never consent . . . ruination to the business," and then again the refrain, "I can't; no, I can't; it wouldn't do . . ."

"He is quite right," she thought, "anyone like me . . . how could he?" And with a feeling of final renunciation, she collapsed in a heap.

Shocked, he hurried to her side, leaned over her, and tried to stroke her hands; but she thrust him from her. At a loss to find words to vindicate his miserable subterfuge, he took up the thread at the point where her laugh had interrupted it.

"Do believe me, dearest friend, when I say that I had given up all thoughts of myself. I swear that I wanted no reward, and subsequently acted for your good alone. My one desire was to preserve you from sinking to the lowest depths. I know from experience how many have done so; a few years, no more, and they either go on the streets, or grow more and more hideous and careworn . . . and then it is impossible to tell what they were once. . . . And that the same fate should not befall you, I hit on the idea

about the cheque and wrote to my American agents. Your falling in with it was such a joy to me that I didn't sleep a wink for two nights. I knew I had saved you from ruin."

"Ruin?" queried Lilly; "what do you mean? Before the cheque came I had earned quite a respectable sum by my art. You yourself helped; you yourself said if I persevered——"

She paused, filled with sudden anxiety at the thought that if it came to a rupture between them to-night her one and only prospect of making a living would be gone.

Not a word of reassurance came from him. In stubborn silence he plucked at the fringe of the table-cloth.

"Please speak. Have you entirely forgotten all you've done for me?"

He pulled himself erect. "If you must know all," he said with a shrug of the shoulders, "perhaps it's as well; from this evening we'll start clear."

"Is there anything else, then?" Lilly cried in ever-increasing dismay.

"Do you remember the day you came over the factory—I made you turn back in the storeroom?"

"Yes, but——"

"And afterwards I made the excuse that the place was not heated."

"I remember perfectly. But what has it to do with my work?"

"If you had gone a few steps further you would have seen all your glass plaques—fifty-six in all—the last not even unpacked."

She looked up at him as if he were her executioner. Then she sank back and buried her face in the sofa. She had no more tears to shed, but the soft darkness of the cushions did her eyes good. She wanted not to see, hear, or think any more—only to die as soon as possible, before starvation and disgrace overtook her.

There was a long silence. She thought he must have gone, when she felt his hand caressing her shoulder, and heard his voice in trembling, pleading appeal say, "Dear, dear, dearest of friends, tell me what else could I have done? Could I deprive you of your one interest and resource? Could I tell you the things were unsaleable rubbish, amateurishly executed? I saw how absolutely wrapped up you were in it for a time,

## CHAPTER VIII

ONCE more a new life began for Lilly. It was all over with her dreaded loneliness. Regularly every afternoon Herr Dehnicke arrived at tea-time. But he was "Herr Dehnicke" no longer. He was Richard, a dear sweet, beloved Richard, who was received with open arms in the hall, against whose knees she leant on the floor of the drawing-room, and from whose brow the little lines of care were smoothed away with a caressing, "Don't frown, dearest."

How absurd it had been to hoard up her love! You could squander and squander, and always have heaps more to spare. The *grande dame* and "gracious baroness" pose was whistled down the wind. Now it was she who stooped and made herself small, and asked to be scolded and punished, who looked out fearfully for every shadow of displeasure on his face, and tried to read his wishes before they were uttered. Above all, she wanted to show that she was grateful—oh, so grateful!—for his goodness, and his tenderness in saving her.

No wonder, then, that his attitude of adoring reverence gradually altered, that he began to be exigent, at times even a little irritable, assuming the airs of a married man, and reminding her of the benefits he had bestowed on her—only very occasionally, it was true, but often enough to convert humility that at first was spontaneous into a duty.

Since Lilly had become his mistress his relations to the outside world had undergone a complete change, so that his whole life was differently ordered. In place of the priggish manufacturer of bronze wares, ever vigilant of his middle-class reputation, he had become a recklessly fast man of the world.

He, who once had been shy of appearing with Lilly in the streets or park, now gloried in exhibiting himself to the public as her cavalier. He bought, instead of the serviceable old

brougham, the latest thing in luxurious victorias, in which he delighted to drive with her along Unter den Linden to the Tiergarten. He selected for their evening amusement the most fashionable places of entertainment in Berlin, and took seats where they were certain to attract attention from every part of the house. He sat in the front of the stage-box with a swelling shirt-front, his chin carefully shaved, his hands perfectly gloved, and strove to meet the opera-glasses levelled at himself and companion with a *blasé* indifferent smile.

He ordered his clothes of the London tailors who in spring and autumn visit Berlin in search of custom. He sported a monocle, and stuck his pocket-handkerchief inside his left cuff. The officer was now more than ever strongly marked in him, and he tried to emulate the effeminate charms of the fops in the Guards.

In brief, all his endeavours were directed to proving himself worthy of a mistress of Lilly's calibre. He soon discovered that possession of so perfect a creature, instead of injuring him, cast an undreamed-of glamour over his career, even enhancing the prosperity of his business more than all his expensive redecorations had been able to do.

The world said: if the senior partner in the firm of Liebert & Dehnicke could afford such an extravagance, it must be doing brilliantly. And many a dealer who formerly had favoured his rivals in the trade now came to him, acting on those mysterious motives of suggestion, the laws of which have puzzled the psychologists and historians of all times. He was addressed with increased respect, yet with that confidential air of jovial banter which the world adopts towards a man of proved steadiness and principle when he is caught tripping. He was much more interesting than in the days of his prosaic virtue. People who before had troubled little about him, and had scarcely even spoken to him, now asked when they were to meet him out of business hours, and hinted that they wouldn't mind making a night of it in his company. Such overtures, indeed, became as common as the Liebert & Dehnicke bronzes.

"By rights, you and your expenses ought to be charged to the business accounts," he said once, smiling at Lilly, who learnt not to resent such tactless speeches.

It had become a matter of habit to go out somewhere



of an evening three or four times a week, and Lilly quickly got to know every pleasure in the Berlin vortex of dissipation. It was too late this winter for the public balls, at which mysterious women who have lost caste masquerade in silken dominoes. But to compensate for this there were the variety theatres of lax observance, where the latest and spiciest obscenities from the Parisian boulevards were diluted and dished up and offered to hungry pleasure-lovers as highly stimulating to the appetite. There were the night cafés, where luridness was draped in literary tags, and flighty women escaped from the restraints of middle-class respectability, competed with the professional music-hall stars for the palm of vulgarity. They frequented bars and grill-rooms and back parlours of fashionable restaurants to which the police forbade lock and key, and where, under the scornfully smiling eyes of correct waiters, dull orgies were held. Lastly came those brilliantly lighted cafés, dense with blue cigarette-smoke, where jaded nerves seek a final pick-me-up in association with prostitution as it parades its wares for sale in the market-place and on the house-tops.

For some time Lilly protested against these distractions; for her senses still aspired to a different and higher kind of enjoyment. She cherished, too, vague feelings of regret that this life of dissipation was drawing her further and further away from those laurel flanked stairs, the goal of her secret longing. But when she saw that every wish she expressed for quiet was met with sullen opposition, she slowly abandoned the idea, and relegated all her dreams of better things to a distant future, when she might look forward to a possibility of their being fulfilled. She dared not let her imagination stray further. Besides, how amusing and fascinating nearly always was this new life! She had every reason to be content with it.

They were not often alone together. There were acquaintances wherever they went. They constantly met Kellermann's carnival guests again. They would fall in with one another informally or make appointments beforehand. They formed a little set of themselves, to which new-comers were always hanging on.

One of the elect was that seductive little dark woman with the unsteady bright eyes and the silly laugh, who at the carnival had wanted to make a family party with her friend and

Lilly at supper. She was called Frau Sievekingk, and prompted by a desire to "live life" she had left her husband, a doctor somewhere in Further Pomerania, and after various adventures was at present being kept by the wealthy proprietor of a steam-laundry, by name Wohlfahrt. He was as thin as a skeleton, had red hair, and suffered from dyspepsia, remedies for which she carried about with her in her handbag, in the shape of tabloids and quack powders. But this touching and considerate attention did not prevent her from deceiving him with every man who made advances to her. It was universally known, and no one blamed her, for she was a poet, and was obliged to seek experiences to write about. An inevitable result of indulging in what many a one had thought was an absolutely secret *liaison* with her was to find himself a few weeks later portrayed to the life as the hero of a passionate short story in a modern German magazine, or providing a theme for a lurid love lyric.

Frau Welter, the divorced wife of the famous composer, was another of their intimate circle. Her round, tanned face—she had lately come back from a secret mission to Algiers—formed a comical contrast to her mass of dyed golden hair, which stood out round her head and neck like a halo. It was rather a dangerous thing to become friendly with her. She asked everyone she met to lend her money, though she was well off, and in receipt of a handsome alimony from her husband's relatives. Her generosity was so boundless that she sacrificed all that she had and all that her friends lent her to a pair of ex-lovers, both of whom were scamps. No one exactly knew under whose protection she was living at the present moment. She was often seen with a pensive judge, who looked as if he had swallowed a poker and used his tongue instead of a toothpick.

A thin shrewish little woman, pretty and malicious, with cold steel-blue eyes and sucked-in lips, always wore white silk, and trailed a fan-shaped train behind her: she called herself Frau Karla, but what her real name was no one knew except her lover, a very young, very pale and slim young man, the son of a rich manufacturer. He gratified her absorbing passion for pleasure, being completely in her power, and followed her about till dawn. In an unguarded moment he had rashly disclosed that she was the wife of a well-known Hebrew scholar, who lived a life of seclusion, and imagined

that she was employed in visiting society in the west-end of Berlin, while he sat peacefully poring over his philological tables. All the time she was racing about from one haunt of vice to another in suspicious company.

Women of every description moved in this "set," their past and their means of support concerning no one so long as they were pretty and elegant and a little above the thorough-paced *cocotte*. Among the men who were not attached as licensed escort to any lady, but who came to fish in troubled waters, was Dr. Salmoni, who at the Kellermann carnival had beaten the big drum with so melancholy a smile. Lilly always felt constrained and tongue-tied in his presence, though there seemed to be some spiritual link between them. Every-one he met came under the lash of his caustic wit, except herself, whom he consideredly spared. Sometimes he seemed to be dissecting her with his keen eyes, and would whisper softly in her ear as he passed her, "What are you doing here, fair lady?"

Herr Kellermann appeared pretty often, got drunk, and then made remarks about a chained beauty crying aloud for release, remarks which Lilly was careful not to notice. He found, as a rule, that towards the end of the evening he had no change in his pocket, so that Richard had to pay his bill.

Such was the world in which Lilly passed her days and nights. She received mysterious communications: invitations from men to whom she had never spoken, asking her to meet them; anonymous presents of flowers—from modest bunches of violets to baskets of showy orchids; calls from ladies of doubtful character who were getting up charity subscriptions, and with a meaning smile hoped Lilly would join them—indeed, it was a never-ceasing wave of vicious desire that rolled up to her threshold. For a time she was alarmed, then she became indifferent.

Spring days came, and with them the great race-meetings, at which everyone with any pretensions to smartness put in an appearance.

Since Lilly in shy queenliness had begun to reign at his side, the sporting tastes, which had been latent in Richard hitherto, awoke, and were developed with such passionate eagerness that he would not have missed a race for the world. Though he did not bet, his pockets were crammed with bookmakers'

"tips," and he talked of little else than pedigrees and winning chances. Lilly, who understood nothing at all about it, cheerfully listened.

One morning after she had read in the paper the results of the previous day's racing, the following passage caught her eye :

" Among charming representatives of the society that does not know what *ennui* is, we again saw the beauty of imposing type who has of late graced various functions, bringing with her an aroma of the *beau monde*, of which it is said she was once an ornament. Her favourite colour seems to be violet, and in accordance with a famous precedent, she might appropriately be dubbed 'La dame aux violettes.' At all events, we congratulate our metropolis on the acquisition of this new luminary, who is certain to add lustre to its reputation."

" Who could that have been ? " Lilly thought, with a slight pang of jealousy, and she tried to recall to her mind the forms of all the women she had admired the day before. But among them she could not identify the heroine of the paragraph.

Then suddenly the blood mounted hotly to her cheeks. She looked at the Redfern coat and skirt of violet cloth, which she had hung on a chair after taking it off yesterday. It was now more than two years old, but so perfectly cut and finished that it could rival any of the most *chic* creations of the spring. She had worn it several times following because she had not another tailor-made gown to equal it, and Richard's pocket must not suffer from her extravagance in dresses. There could be no further doubt. She it was who was meant, and no other.

Her first thought was, " How pleased Richard will be ! "

But she, too, was pleased. Frau Laue's boldest prophecies seemed to be coming true. She had awakened to find herself famous. She was actually in the newspapers !

If only it had not been for that strange inexplicable feeling of fear, which was always crouching at the bottom of her heart, and came creeping to the surface whenever some unexpected event advanced her a little further on the road to fame and happiness ! All the time that she had been going out in the

world at Richard's side, nothing had happened to her that was not a source of joy, pride, and hopefulness. Everyone seemed to respect her, everyone flattered her. Torturing uncertainty and contempt of herself had given place to a calm appreciation of her own value in the sight of strangers. Yet that dull harassing fear was ever present. Nothing really silenced it.

Richard came earlier than usual that afternoon, waving the Monday paper up at her from the street. When they had embraced each other a dozen times at least, and read the paragraph over twenty times, he became taciturn and moody, and with his arms crossed in a Napoleonic pose he paced the room with short ringing steps. It was plain that his brain was bursting with ambition.

Then there was a ring, and little Frau Sievekingk was announced. She had often looked in before to have a friendly chat with Lilly, but they had not become more intimate in consequence. To-day she came at the right moment to share in the exultation over Lilly's newly acquired fame.

Her grey velvet bolero suit shimmered in the evening light, and her jaunty scarlet toque, with its drooping plumes, fitted on to her dark curly coiffure like a cap of flame.

She held out her hand to Lilly with her most alluring smile, but, when she turned to Richard, there flashed in her shifty bright eyes a gleam of determination similar to that with which she intimidated her red-headed lover into taking his tabloids for dyspepsia. As since the carnival they had continued outwardly to maintain the sham of a platonic friendship, Richard meekly took up his hat, as if giving Lilly a cue to ask him formally if he could not stay longer. But the little woman forestalled them.

"Don't pretend," she said, "that you are not perfectly at home here. As if I didn't understand! Please call each other by your Christian or pet names, and I'll seem as if I hadn't heard."

Both smiled, and while Lilly gave her guest a cup of tea, he toyed with the newspaper in question, a little obviously, for he wanted to find out whether Frau Sievekingk had heard anything of their great triumph.

"That is just what I've come to talk about," said the little lady, "that rubbish in the paper. I suppose you think an awful lot of it?"

Richard made a gesture of protest, but smiled complacently. "To speak frankly, I should have credited you with a little more sense."

"Would you really?" Richard exclaimed, aghast, and Lilly jumped. The crouching fear that had made itself felt earlier seemed to tell her that even this piece of undiluted good fortune might conceal a sting.

"Please listen to what I am going to say," the little visitor continued, and her eyes flashed now not shiftily but steadily. "I have experience in these matters, for my red-headed boy tried the same game on with me at first. . . . I wonder if the thought has ever occurred to you, Herr Dehnicke, that when one of the *élite*, as is that sweet exquisitely unique creature sitting there, entrusts herself to your care, you have taken a gigantic responsibility upon your shoulders? Do you men think we exist merely to feed and advertise your vanity? We're not milliners or chorus girls who want to be dressed up in silks and chiffons simply that the world may see what a dog you are. We may have lost caste, it is true, but that doesn't mean we are by a long way come down to what you would like to treat us as."

Richard struggled to retort, but could not find words.

Then she bent tenderly towards Lilly, and continued: "A poor butterfly of aristocratic lineage comes flitting along unsuspectingly and says, 'Take me—you can do what you like with me.' And what are you going to do with her? Are you going to make a bad woman of her, or rather what the world accepts as a bad woman? No! I won't be contradicted. That's a good beginning," and she pointed to the paper; "if once the scorpions of the Press busy themselves about us, then the gallants of the Guards are on our track. Then God help you! They are far handsomer and more gallant than any of you, and if we must be driven into the ranks of the *cocottes*, we'd rather know by whom and for whom. Afterwards you find yourselves chucked, a stale joke of the day before yesterday—nothing more."

All this confused Lilly and turned her giddy. She could not have believed that anyone would dare to speak to Richard in such a tone, and she laid her hand protestingly and comfortingly on his shoulder, fearful that he would be angry and assert his dignity as host.

But he did nothing of the sort.

"I am willing to be guided by you," he said humbly, "if you'll only tell me what——"

"If you don't know what you ought to do, I'll tell you. You ought not to trot her out and put her through her paces as if she were a prize animal, exposing her to the gaze of any gaping crew. Don't put her in the front of your box at the theatre for every *roué* to look at through his opera-glasses."

Richard manned himself to parry her attack.

"If I may venture to ask the question, are you not to be seen everywhere?" he asked.

"Yes, certainly, because I want to see as well as be seen. That is why I ran away from my brute of a husband and chucked respectability. Still, I don't sit in the front of boxes, and I don't let myself be trotted up and down a race-course. I am a Bohemian; Lilly, on the contrary, with her placid refined nature, is a home-bird, and should be treated as if she were your legal wife. . . . We neither of us want to descend to the *demi-monde*—that is to say, what we call *demi-monde* here in Germany; in the French sense we are already there. Now I have said my say, Herr Dehnicke."

Richard stood up. He had grown very red, and was biting his moustache with impotent resentment.

"I have always put her welfare before everything," he said. "Besides, I have only acted according to her wishes; have I not, Lilly?"

Lilly felt she couldn't contradict him. She did not desire to see him further humiliated, and said nothing.

"And if you acted a thousand-fold according to her wishes," answered the little woman for her, "you were wrong. You should have said, 'My child, you don't understand this sort of life; as we are not married—which, mark my word, would be far the best for both of you—we must live at a moderate pace, otherwise I shall do you an irreparable injury and drag you into the mud.'"

Tears sprang to Lilly's eyes at the mention of the word "married" in relation to herself and Richard. To hide her emotion she went hurriedly to fetch his overcoat, for it was a quarter to six.

She accompanied him to the door, and kissed him affectionately; she did not wish him to think that she bore him any grudge.

To her guest, she stood up for him zealously. He had been very kind and good to her, he had not meant any harm, and he had saved her from an evil fate.

"I didn't come here to make mischief," the little woman said, laughing, and asked if she might sit on a little longer. She mentioned, too, that her name was Julia, and expressed a desire to be called by it in future.

They now sat hand in hand on the sofa—above which Walter's portrait had been replaced by a very mediocre sheep-shearing scene—and nibbled cakes from the little glass plates on their laps. For the first time Lilly enjoyed the sensation of possessing a friend of her own sex, for she had always been too much in awe of Fräulein von Schwertfeger to regard her in that light.

The bullfinch sang a piteous little song of spring, and the sparrows answered from the chestnut-trees outside. The May sunshine reflected tremulous spirals on the walls, and now and again a flash of gold lightning raced across the aquarium, stirring the green sedges and grasses.

This was an hour for confidences.

"Didn't I put on airs just now?" Frau Julia said. "But it was necessary, my sweet. You, like me, are standing on the brink of a precipice. One little push and over we go, and then no one can pick us up again. If we had any character to rely on it wouldn't be so bad . . . but we don't know how to be faithful, and, what is more, we don't want to be."

"How *can* you say that?" cried Lilly in horror.

Frau Julia showed the point of her little red tongue between her lips.

"Just wait a bit, my dearest. The men we meet are scarcely calculated to make us think that we are ordained for the pleasure of one only. In fact, the only way to appreciate them is to take them in the plural. Oh! I could open your eyes to a thing or two; but I don't want to frighten you . . . besides, the plural number is dangerous. . . . Each man we give ourselves to takes away a bit of what is best in us. Yes, our best, though I can't exactly define it. It's not self-esteem, because that survives sometimes; it's not purity, we don't care a pin about purity; and it's not happiness. I tell you, we should be bored to death if we stuck to one man. I have talked about it to a lot of women, and they all agree on



*that* point. Some of them think it's better not to fall in love at all, and only do it for fun ; others swear by the *grande passion* that will consecrate everything. No two people think quite alike. And now I should like to give you a few hints, because the day will come when you are sure to need them. Don't let them give you presents—that is to say, not things of value. Flowers are permissible, but not too many. And don't give *them* presents, because only honest married women can afford to do that. Beware, as a rule, of the lover offering gifts, for that simply breeds *cocottes*. As I say, married women may do what is not fitting for us to do ; they have to be revenged for being tied by the leg to the '*one only*.' We, on the other hand, are free, and can go when we like. We may do everything but that ; we mayn't do that."

"Why mayn't we ?" asked Lilly, becoming suddenly conscious of her chains.

"Married women may do anything ; they may be divorced a hundred times and hold their heads as high as ever. . . . But in our case it is always a plunge lower ; the oftener we change, the more we become common booty. It's all very well if we have money of our own, but you and I haven't. They hover about us, watching like vultures . . . and they say to themselves, 'If so-and-so can keep her, and so-and-so, why shouldn't my good money buy her ?' For this reason a woman should cleave closely to the one she has got—no matter how small and despicable he is, or how much she may loathe him in her secret soul."

"I don't quite understand you," said Lilly. "Surely the one you have is the one you love."

"What ! Have you loved every one of them ?"

"Good gracious ! There haven't been so many," Lilly answered. "Besides my husband the general"—she could not resist pronouncing the "proud" word—"there was only one other, and this one."

"Nonsense !" exclaimed Frau Julia, genuinely indignant. "Are you setting up to be a model of virtue ?"

Lilly assured her that she had spoken the truth.

Frau Julia had difficulty in grasping it. "Then you don't belong to us at all ! You ought to be a judge's wife."

Lilly laughed. After believing herself condemned for ever on account of her immorality, it was refreshing to find someone who ridiculed her for being too good.

" Ah ! if I were to tell you the stories of all the women who are around us, you would be surprised," Frau Julia went on. " Some will only look at girls. Some let furnished rooms to students, that are only taken by those they fancy ; others "—here she lowered her voice to a whisper—" others find their lovers in the streets."

Lilly shuddered. " What ? Have I sat next them, perfectly unsuspecting ? "

Frau Julia's eyes burned into vacancy. " It's awful, isn't it ? " she said, and laughed. " I don't care so much ; you see, I have my poetry—the sort of thing that gives me absolute. For *its* sake everything is sacrificed. One must have sensations. I must feel my blood run quicker . . . I must study human nature ; there is something new in every-one. . . . No matter how wretched a specimen a man is, with brains and soul that might be packed into a thimble, he can give you an hour of ecstasy—one hour in which bells chime, in which the spheres are full of organ-sounds. And the more you have, the more life you live, the more souls do you creep to the other side of. Doors are flung open : all secrets are revealed. . . And if you can hear a stranger's heart beating, can feel his heart-beats in your fingertips—then he is yours, part of yourself. Then you live one life more. Yes, that is life—really life."

She put up her arms and clasped her hands at the back of her neck.

Lilly said to herself that she couldn't take this talk seriously. but she felt hot and cold waves pass over her.

" I don't understand at all what you are talking about," she said, rising.

Frau Julia didn't seem to hear. Her eyes were full of mystic fire. She looked like a priestess sacrificing to strange gods.

It struck eight. The maid servant who had been laying the table in the next room had set a place for the lady, who didn't seem inclined to go, and now came in to announce that the repast was ready.

" Will you stay and have supper with me ? " Lilly asked against her will.

Frau Julia at last collected herself ; she neither accepted nor declined, but got up and removed her scarlet toque from her dark locks.

"I am quite mad, am I not?" she asked, and the silly but alluring smile played about her lips again.

With a sigh of relief, Lilly opened the dining-room door.

The table was covered with a sheeny damask cloth, on which leaves of light were cast by the hanging lamp. The bright-coloured dinner service, copied from an old Strasburg pattern, had been bought by Lilly cheap at a sale, and the plate, including the castors and the sugar-tongs, shone as brightly as real silver, and could only be distinguished from it by the absence of a mark. The idea was, that when Richard stayed to meals he should find all as well ordered and spick-and-span as at his mother's table.

Frau Julia gave an exclamation of delight. "Oh, how charming you have made it all—so dear and cosy! I do believe I am right in saying that you were born to be a married housewife. You should see my rubbishy place! But what is the good of keeping up appearances when my red-headed boy ruins his digestion at restaurants, dining on lamb kidneys *au lard* and truffles? When he is at home I make him gruel and bread-crumbs, and give it to him straight out of the saucepan, without any ceremony or laying of table."

"Thank goodness," Lilly thought, "she is her natural self again."

The meal was quite unpretentious, consisting of cold meat dishes and baked potatoes, with the remains of a tart for sweet. But Frau Julia ate with a greater relish than she had known for years, and commented on everything.

Lilly told her that for the sake of economy she ordered her meat from the country. She would gladly give her friend the address.

"I guessed you did that," said Frau Julia, with a soft sigh, her eyes meditatively fixed on space. . . . And after a pause came the confession in a low voice. "It was the same there."

"Where?" asked Lilly.

"At home, where we lived."

Then suddenly she hurled away her napkin, jumped up, and went to the open window. She wrung her hands, beat her forehead, and called hysterically into the evening air: "I am going to the bad as fast as I can—utterly to the bad!"

"What is the matter with you?" Lilly stammered. She was so shocked that she too sprang up and went to the window.

"I want to go back to my husband . . . to my husband. . . . My husband is a monster, a beast, it's true. Life there is simply death . . . that's all perfectly true. Yet I want to go back to my husband. . . . Here I shall go under—under."

Lilly laid her hand caressingly on her neck.

"Why, dear," she said consolingly, "you have just been giving me such useful instructions as to how to avoid going under. And, then, you have in your literary art a mainstay, which I lost long ago." Sighing, she glanced at the curtained cupboards, where the last of her pasted sunset forests glowed in obscurity. "No, no; you will not go under. You will rise higher and higher, to the very top, and from there look down on other poor women."

Frau Julia sobbed on her shoulder. "Never now, never!" she cried. "I can't get out of this whirlpool. It's poisoned me; my brain is poisoned. I am going to the bad! I am going to the bad!"

Lilly put her arm gently in hers and led her back to the sofa-corner in the unlighted drawing-room, where she had been sitting before.

"Ah, here it is nice and dark," she said, whimpering like a child. "Here I can tell you everything, but shut the door; there mustn't be a gleam of light."

Lilly closed the door of the "pattern" room. Now they were sitting in the dark. Only the late evening twilight, which from the canal penetrated the still scanty branches of the chestnuts, cast a greyish shadow on her tear-stained face.

"Just now," began Frau Julia, "I spoke of women who sought their love adventures in the streets, and you started up in horror. Do you know who one of these women is? I am one."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Lilly.

"Yes, I am one. The evening that my red-headed boy leaves me alone, I put on dark things and drive into districts where nobody knows who I am. When I meet someone whom I like the look of, I give him a glance that makes him turn round and speak to me; then I go with him into a common inn, or to a little confectioner's, anywhere he likes, or I sit with him on a seat in the dark . . . and if I like him still better than I thought . . . I will just go with him anywhere—anywhere he asks me to go."

"Oh, how dreadful that is!" said Lilly, and pressed her hands to her eyes. Now she knew why a few months ago something had seemed to draw her more and more powerfully to the streets, why a pleasant thrill had passed through her when someone had addressed her in the dark; only, of course, she had been too nervous to answer.

"And now I have told you this, and you know what I am, you won't want me to sit on your beautiful sofa any more!" cried Frau Julia. "Say it plump out, and I'll go." She caught Leseechingly at Lilly's hands.

Lilly felt like a good Samaritan who, having come across someone grievously afflicted, was bound to do the best she could for her.

"What makes you do it?" she asked gently. "You are not so lonely. How have you come to it?"

"Yes, how have I come to it? Can you say how you have come to what you are? It's all very well for people to reproach us with weakness; but one necessity leads on to another, one wish gives birth to more wishes, and one always thinks one is doing right."

"That is true enough," Lilly faltered, recalling the decisive moments of her own life.

"I have always persuaded myself that I must do it for the sake of my poetry. I must have experiences, pictures, and what the French call *frisson*. But all that is nothing but an excuse, a mere pretext. The truth is that you just seek and seek. Your own husband is not what you want, your red-headed boy isn't either, and all the rest aren't—your sportsmen, merchants, and lieutenants. But you think he must be somewhere. Perhaps he's that stranger at the next table? You are almost sure he is, so you become acquainted with him, and find that he isn't. It's none of the worthy ones, for however much trouble they may take to possess us they take no trouble to find out if there is anything worthy in us. And so you have to go on searching. Perhaps it will be someone in the street? It becomes at last a positive fever . . . it consumes and burns you up. Often I can't sleep for thinking of the next dark night when I shall be wandering about looking . . . Don't you see? It *must* end in ruin to me, body and soul. And this evening, when I saw your daintily laid supper-table, all at once a longing came over me for my home and husband. Yes, I am periodically tortured with that

longing. He has weak eyes, and smells of carbolic. Oh, that vilest of all vile smells! How much I should like to smell it again! I shouldn't even mind his throwing his stethoscope at me as often as he likes. He has written asking me to go back. . . . I can go back if I choose . . . and yet I don't go. I stay here and perish. Oh, life is farcical!"

She rose and fumbled for her hat and hatpins, which lay on the table.

Lilly couldn't bear her to go in such an agitated state of mind.

"If you feel that it is a poison in your blood, that it must ruin you, why don't you guard against it? Why don't you conquer the feeling? Force of will can do a lot."

"I have often said so to myself," replied Frau Julia, "but I have never had anyone to confide in about it who could help me. Now I have found you it will be easier. Now I almost feel as if I could—could conquer it."

"Will you promise me to try?" asked Lilly, holding out her hand.

"Yes, I promise," she cried, and shook hands joyously. "You are going to be my saviour. You are already. And to thank you, I will keep a sharp lookout that you aren't spoilt. You shall never be what I am, and what the others are."

"Oh, I can look after myself," murmured Lilly.

"Ah, so you say! But when the dreary void comes, and *he* grows more and more unsatisfying and colourless, you have nothing to say to each other, and you mustn't have children. . . None of us have them, because we all know how to prevent their coming. He lets you have no part or lot in his affairs, and you feel behind everything how his family hates you. *They* think we are a species of harpy. And then how constantly he proclaims his intention of marrying when he wants most to annoy us! And, above all, there's the longing . . . it's like an everlasting dead gnawing toothache . . . yes, it's just like toothache. Wherever you are, it torments you. For life cannot end like this, you say to yourself; something must happen at last. Oh, it's ten times worse than marriage! Wait and see if it isn't. . . ."

Lilly's heart became ever sorer at her words. A wild misery clutched her.

"Pray say no more," she begged. "If it's to be, it'll come soon enough. I don't want to think about it."

"You are right, darling," said Frau Julia; "it does no good." And she took her leave.

"You won't forget your promise?" Lilly reminded her from the top of the stairs.

"Never; no, never! I swear it." And she glided out.

With a whirling brain, Lilly went back to the darkened drawing-room and leaned absently and dejectedly out of the open window to breathe in the freshness of the evening air.

She watched the tiny woman who had just come out at the front entrance trip lightly and gracefully along the pavement.

A man in a tall hat and patent-leather shoes passed her, then hesitated, stopped, and turned back again. As he came up with her he lifted his hat with exaggerated courtesy.

By the light of the street-lamp Lilly saw her face upturned to his, full of curiosity, and with an ingratiating smile, and then they walked on—together.

## CHAPTER IX

**R**ICHARD was reluctant to conform to a more temperate manner of life. He was still eager to be seen with Lilly and to have her admired. But little Frau Julia's lecture had really touched his conscience, and he had not the nerve to set it at defiance.

Nevertheless, he sulked and brooded and yawned, and seemed so bored that Lilly, to cheer him up, was on the point of volunteering to accompany him to the next race-meeting, when news reached her that her mother was dead.

She cried a great deal, and her grief was in proportion to the tenderness of her heart, which was very soft. But in reality her mother had been dead to her for so long that the sorrow she felt at her actual death could not be very deep or lasting.

Before starting for the West Prussian asylum to attend the funeral, her chief anxiety had been to get as simple mourning as possible, for she was ashamed not to have done more for her mother, and did not wish to give cause for scandal by being too elegant as she stood at the pauper grave. All the same, the officials and doctors at the asylum were most deferential to her, and appeared to regard her as some exquisite black bird of Paradise.

It was not till after she had spent three very hot spring evenings, praying and meditating, beside the small heap of gravel, that she returned to Berlin, full of serious thoughts and re-awakened memories.

While away she had thought she hated Richard, but when she found him waiting for her at the station, she sank into his arms helplessly, craving for his sympathy. For now she had no one else but him ; he really was her all on earth.

It was an understood thing that for the next few months nocturnal dissipations should cease on account of her mourning,



and to his credit Richard showed her every consideration in the matter. He sat at home spending many quiet evenings with her, reading books that he couldn't appreciate and playing backgammon; and would go to sleep on the sofa rather than attempt to beguile her into the gay world. But in order that he should not be quite lost to that world, it was agreed that he should have every other evening to himself.

The notoriety that his beautiful mistress had acquired smoothed the way for him. He was elected to the Club that he had long hankered after, through the support of two of her aristocratic admirers, without a single blackball. So now it was open to him to enjoy the supreme felicity of losing part of his firm's hardly earned fortune to young scions of the nobility, foreign attachés, and other superior beings.

Lilly was not pleased to hear of his losses, which he confided to her with much feigned growling and grumbling. She practised economy more assiduously than before to try and make them good. He laughed at her efforts, and declared that she cost him no more than an extra cigarette a day, but her conviction that she was a burden on the firm of Liebert & Dehnicke remained deeply rooted.

On the quiet evenings that he recruited from his nights of dissipation their business conversations were resumed. Lilly liked to "talk shop," and she displayed a keen commercial as well as artistic faculty.

Richard frequently brought with him sketches of models, and they would sit with their heads bent together over unrolled charts, planning and consulting like a pair of partners. Those hours were almost blissful, and she never tired of asking questions about the factory itself. How many hands, male and female, were employed there at the present moment? Was that man or woman or this one there now? She didn't know their names, but could describe their faces exactly. What work had they chiefly on hand? Had the supply of certain models run out? Thus she kept herself *au courant* with the inner life of the business.

The factory was her ill-starred love, as she often said in joke to Richard. If she was allowed to call for him after business hours at the office, it was the greatest treat he could give her. If she could have had her way she would have found an excuse for going daily to the factory; but Richard didn't wish it. The employes, he said, had long

ago got to know what their relations to each other were, and he must be careful not to lay himself open to disrespectful gossip.

She was sure that this could not be his only motive. There was something else behind. She had realised for some time that his mother was not well disposed towards her. Once he had talked about her quite freely and openly, but now he avoided the subject, even when Lilly asked direct questions.

It was likely enough that he was afraid of raising the old lady's ire by giving his mistress the run of his office, so she had to content herself by taking interest from a distance in the welfare of the little kingdom.

On the evenings that she was left alone, she was in the habit of making ten-o'clock pilgrimages to the Alte Jakobstrasse on her own account.

She would take up a position on the opposite side of the street and gaze reverentially across at the old grey house, with its wonderful modern embellishments. She admired the imitation marble pillars, which now gave an air of splendour, in the style of the Renaissance, to the entrance. She stared up at the floor where his mother made her home, and withdrew timorously into the darkness of a doorway when a woman's threatening shadow was cast on the drawn curtains. When it grew late and people ceased to come in and out of the house, she would boldly cross the street, slip up the steps to the front-door, and with her face pressed against the iron gate peep at the interior of the staircase landing, whence came the sheen of laurels, the milky radiance of the Clytie bust, and the dark, rich chequered glow of the stained-glass windows, an impressive combination that recalled the dim religious light of a chapel.

Those front-door steps grew to be a sort of sacred pilgrims' way, along which penitents crawled on their hands and knees; the stained-glass became a heavenly glory; the Clytie a benedictory saint.

Towards autumn Richard was called out to serve at the manœuvres. His letters were curt and few, and their tone could not disguise his bad temper. The last was dated from the hospital, as he was on the sick list, owing to a fracture of the knee-joint caused by a fall from his horse.

It would prevent his riding again for a long time, perhaps for ever.

When he came back in October he was still compelled to wear a knee-cap, and sent in his resignation. The accident really proved a piece of good fortune, for rumours of his relations with the divorced wife of the commander of the regiment had got afloat, and in consequence he was being cut by his fellow-officers. His superiors were only waiting for confirmatory evidence to call him before a court-martial, a proceeding which would certainly have deprived him of his commission in the Reserves. He thus escaped by the skin of his teeth public disgrace, and his surly reproachful manner to Lilly was meant to show how much he had sacrificed for her sake.

The news of the colonel, which he had gathered indirectly, filled her with dismay. The old martinet had turned Fräulein von Schwertfeger out of the castle, having become obsessed by the suspicion that she had acted in collusion with the guilty lovers. He now lived the life of a misanthropic recluse, and it was feared he might go out of his mind. A message of evil indeed from that past of sunshine.

As winter approached, one of Frau Julia's prophecies seemed as if it were coming to pass. Richard began to discuss his matrimonial prospects with Lilly, not to annoy her, it is true, but simply because it had become a habit to unburden his mind to her about everything that troubled him.

His mother had invited an orphaned heiress on a visit to their house. Of course, she had done it solely for *his* benefit, and no other reason. He had to sit next her at meals every day. She was a rather pallid girl and had hair the colour of straw. She looked at him with big strange eyes, and seemed to ask, "When are you going to propose?" And his mother was for ever preaching to him.

Things couldn't go on as they were. Another winter like the two last and every decent family among their acquaintance would be pointing the finger of scorn at him—so his mother said—and it was enough to drive a fellow distracted. Lilly felt as if icy water was streaming down her back. But she maintained a brave face, and showed no more inward emotion than if they were discussing a model for a new "bronze."

"Do you think you could care for her?" she asked.

"Good God! What do you call 'caring'?" he answered, staring beyond her vacantly. "You talk as if I were serious about it. I believe you wouldn't mind getting rid of me."

He pretended to be angry, and Lilly reasoned with him coolly. He mustn't imagine for a moment that she would stand in his way. She had nothing but his happiness at heart. It would make her proud if he gave her his confidence and did not take this step—now or later—without talking it all over with her first.

He was touched, kissed her, and replied that so far it was all in the air.

But the conversation left Lilly beset with dread as if by a nightmare. Her one coherent thought was, "If he leaves me in the lurch now, what will become of me?"

Grief for her mother's death was nothing compared with this martyrdom of anxiety. The vultures that Frau Julia had spoken of occurred to her—all those greedy vultures, in white shirt-fronts and black coats, hovering round to offer her their "good money" directly her friend and protector should have deserted her. And then she thought of those other vultures in Kellermann's picture, cowering on the sun-baked rocks, ready to pounce on the naked beauty directly she became defenceless.

"Her chains are her weapon of defence," Lilly said to herself, "and so it is with me. As soon as I am free, I am lost."

The next day neither of them alluded at first to the dangerous topic, but Richard was absent-minded and ill at ease. Then Lilly took heart and said huskily, "I see, Richard, you are still undecided in your mind. Won't you bring me a photograph of her to see? No one knows you as well as I do, and no one will be able to judge better whether or not she is suited to you."

He vehemently denied that he was trying to make up his mind. The girl was nothing to him. She was an empty-headed doll. But his indignation was not genuine, and his eyes were fixed on space. For "the doll" had five millions.

And the next afternoon he brought her photograph. Without taking it out of the soft paper in which it was wrapped, she laid it aside. Merely touching it made her hands tremble.

She was afraid that her first glance at it would betray her inward agitation.

"Aren't you going to look at it?" he asked, a little disappointed.

"There will be time enough when you are gone," she replied, and congratulated herself on her smile of indifference.

When he was in the hall she called after him:

"To-morrow I will tell you what I think, you know."

Then she rushed back to the photograph, not omitting, however, to wave from the window to Richard, a duty which had become a habit with her.

"And now . . . now the photograph!" Oh, what a good, calm, rather delicate-looking girlish face it was, looking at her with sorrowful though nice eyes. The fair plaits of hair, as thick as a man's wrist, were twisted round the back of the head in country fashion; a timid smile played on the full-lipped mouth. It was the face of a lovable child. Happiness would make it bloom like a spray of lilac put in water. It indicated a nature reposeful, not too gifted, housewifely, and clinging. Exactly what he wanted.

She placed the picture on a chair and threw herself on her knees before it. She prayed and wrestled with herself, but in the end she could not help saying to herself again, "Exactly what he wants; what he would never find a second time if he hunted all the world over."

And she had five millions! If she did not give him up now she would indeed be one of those harpies, to whom, according to Frau Julia, she and her kind were likened in respectable family circles.

"But he is mine; I have the right of possession! What good would his five millions do me if through them I go to the bad altogether? Why should I sacrifice myself for him or anyone?"

The word "harp" continued to ring persistently in her ears.

She thought of the Furies depicted in the illustrated mythology books, the terror of all school-children, with their beautiful hair and murderous claws.

"What I have is mine! I have a right to keep it, a right to tear it to pieces too."

Oh, what a night that was. She lay in bed with her knees

drawn up to her chin and her face buried in her lap, sobbing. She stuffed her clothes into her mouth, tore them out again, and sobbed anew ; and at last, towards morning, a resolve was born of her tears, her shudders, her prayers, and bitter strife with herself—a resolve that seemed to bring release and salvation : “ This afternoon, when he comes, I will tell him.” But no ! Why wait till the afternoon ? Why let him cross the threshold first ? How easily might the influence of their wonted association bring the great work of self-sacrifice to nothing ! She must choose another place, somewhere less familiar, from which she could quickly escape as soon as she felt his presence made her falter.

She had been forbidden, it is true, to visit his office without special permission ; but if she chose the luncheon hour, and found him sitting quietly resting in his private back room, this would be the most favourable and easiest opportunity for an interview. No one would notice her going in, and she would not be disturbing him. Besides, so sacred a resolve as hers justified every step she might take.

She spent the morning in arranging and packing up his letters. She intended to restore these to him with the photograph of his future bride, so that his mind should be set at rest concerning them once for all.

Then she dressed more carefully than usual, and washed away the traces of her tears with milk of lilies. She waved her hair so that it descended over her neck in full ripples, such as she had seen in Greek statues. She felt, indeed, like one of those marble women of ancient Greece, so serenely elevated was her frame of mind above earthly happiness and sorrow.

She drove to the office. As the clocks chimed a quarter-past one she stood at the pillared portico. No one was about in the yard ; only the porter took off his cap with a friendly smile. To him she was still the “ boss’s ” lady-love.

It was a pity that she did not take the precaution of being announced.

The door of the outer office was standing open, as usual when he was still at work in his room. She knew the secret catch that opened the wooden rail of partition, and passed through. She knocked cautiously at the further door. To-day it was shut, which was not usual.

He said, "Come in."

She went in, and stood face to face—with his mother.

This was the first time she had ever seen her. She was quite different from what she had expected. Instead of the tall, thin, silver-haired, stately old lady her imagination had pictured, she saw sitting at his writing-table a stout woman of middle height, with grizzled locks under her black lace cap. A pair of cold grey eyes looked up at her with a surprised and indignant glance.

"This is his mother," she thought.

Richard jumped up from his revolving-chair, and Lilly, speechless with terror, stared at the old lady, who in her turn sprang to her feet. An expression of fury and scorn blazed in the cold grey eyes.

"This is really a charming state of things," she cried, turning her head from one to the other with sharp, angry jerks. "Charming! I am not even safe in my own house, it seems. . . . I must ask you, Richard, not to expose me again to a meeting with a person of this description."

And while Lilly timidly and respectfully made room for her to pass, she swept to the door with a snort of rage.

"What are you doing here? What do you mean by coming here?"

Never had he shouted at her like this before.

He stood in front of her with his hands thrust deeply into his trouser-pockets, biting the ends of his moustache, while his head was so much on one side it almost lay on his shoulder. He looked like a savage, infuriated bull.

She wanted to hand him the photograph and packet of letters, and tell him everything, but her limbs and tongue seemed paralysed.

"I . . . I . . . I only . . ." she stammered with a sob.

"I . . . I . . . I only . . ." he scoffingly mimicked her. "I only wanted to wriggle myself in here. I . . . I . . . would like to be mistress here. Isn't that it, eh? . . . No, no, my angel; we must put an end to this at once. . . . Your so-called ill-starred love of my factory always struck me as a bit suspicious. Get out of here! Get out, I say! Get out!"

And the next minute she was out—out in the street.

She still held the packet in its tissue-paper wrappings convulsively between her cramped fingers. Staggering, she walked on, past staring red houses that threatened to fall on her. She saw a truck loaded with sacks of flour scattering white clouds. A pulley screeched in a factory yard. Every time she saw anyone coming towards her she swerved into the gutter, shrinking away in fear from the jeers of the passer-by. A skein of wool that someone had lost lay on the pavement. She picked it up and thought of hanging herself, for something must be done.

It was all very well to be abandoned and deserted ; when your time came you could expect nothing else, and must resign yourself to fate—but to be stormed at and flung off, to be kicked out as if you were a burglar, to be despised and spat upon like the lowest woman in the streets—oh, that was too much !

She must do something to be revenged on him. And even if such a revenge would no longer affect him, that didn't matter. He should at least be convinced that he was to blame for everything. When she was wallowing in that mire of which he had formerly expressed so much horror on her account—when she was there . . . Yes, something must be done, now, at once—some suicidal act which would make her worthy of the gross treatment she had received at his hands—something to free her from these torments, these horrible torments !

Her heart hung in her breast like a painful tumour. She could have outlined it with her finger, it felt so sharply prominent. It was as if some claw held it in its clutch. And then again the vultures occurred to her—the vultures crouching on the rocks in Kellermann's picture.

They were crouching to spring on Lillv Czepanek. Whom else ? Ah, now she had it ! The thought flashed through her brain like an arrow. She called a cab and drove quickly to Herr Kellermann's house.

She ran up the stairs, which little more than eight months ago she had descended, steeped in bliss, at Richard's side. She stood in the unaired, dark ante-room with its fusty smell, and knocked with a faltering hand at the studio door.

Herr Kellermann sat on the floor in his tartan socks and down-at-heel slippers making coffee, as on her first visit. He had a rather bloated look, but seemed pleased with himself.



" Good heavens ! " he exclaimed, drawing the collar of his night-shirt together. " What brings you hither, lovely goddess, so suddenly ? Have your setting suns been rising again ? "

She said nothing, but laid her hat and cloak on a chair and began to unfasten her blouse. She looked round for a screen, but there wasn't one, for the models who frequented this studio were not generally troubled with shyness.

He sprang up and stared hard at her. Then, when he understood what she intended to do, he burst into a sudden shout of joy.

" What did I say ? Wasn't I right ? Ha, ha ! It has come to that, has it ? We are crying aloud for release. We want to be set free, eh ? "

" I am not crying aloud for anything," said Lilly. " Kindly turn your eyes the other way till necessary." The corners of her mouth curled in scorn.

He seized the picture, blew the dust off it—adjusted his easel, laughing and chuckling to himself. " I knew she'd come. I said she'd come ! "

Lilly fumbled at the strings and buttons of her garments. Then she slowly cast them from her one by one. Thus she stood, in the garish light of the studio, pricked by a thousand needles of shame, and exposed her unclothed body to the artist's gloating gaze

The next afternoon Richard came to tea as usual. His eyes were red and watery, and he looked depressed, but his manner did not betray the least consciousness of anything out of the ordinary having happened.

She had hardly expected that he would come at all, and received him in chilly surprise.

" Oh, about yesterday," he said carelessly. " Mother and I had a beastly row. I had to promise her that you wouldn't come to the factory again. So now we won't allude to it any more. The little girl with the fair hair leaves us this evening. Give me a kiss."

So they kissed, and everything was the same as ever.

## CHAPTER X

THE twigs of the chestnuts had again put on their yellow gloves, and many a leaf started on a whirling journey down the canal. Once more the vista of grey water through the opening in the branches widened, tame wild-ducks foraged along the banks, and the barges, sinking deep into the water under their cargoes of odoriferous summer fruit, drifted lazily to market. The world muffled itself up for coming winter days, and the purveyors of pleasure in the capital were astir.

In seemly half-mourning the round of dissipation began again, Richard objecting to being kept in a glass case any longer. But this time they ceased to aspire to stage boxes and the gorgeous luxury of distinguished night restaurants. Having established a reputation through the ownership of a famous and withal inexpensive "*horizontale de grande marque*," one could afford to remain on the level of a middle-class "smart set," where German champagne is drunk and Kempinski's proves a lodestar. They passed countless hours of reckless debauchery in cabarets and theatres where smoking was allowed, in snug corners, and in eminently respectable-looking private back rooms. Women who had felt themselves a little *de trop* in the other society were more festive here than ever before, and the men congratulated themselves on not "bluing" so much money.

The people you met remained pretty much the same. Only a few dandies fell off, not being able to conceive an existence of pleasure from which the joy of being patronised by cavalry officers in mufti was absent. Lilly followed the crowd, imagining there was no choice. She sat for the most part saying little, but smiling a great deal in a friendly way. She let the men pay her as much attention as they pleased, but responded without enthusiasm, and she listened indifferently

to the women's confidences. She was popular with her feminine compeers, who all recognised in her the amiable quality of not wishing to poach on their preserves.

It might have been thought that she was stupid and lacking in animation if occasionally she had not thawed under the influence of champagne, which was capable of working an amazing revolution in her. Then she seemed gradually to awake from her torpor, her eyes grew brilliant, her cheeks rosy. She would laugh shrilly and say madly improper things, even repeating the colonel's old Casino jokes, till at last she was worked up into a state of rapture, in which she sang comic songs in a tremulous twittering falsetto, mimicked well-known actors and actresses, and even broke into more daring dances than were ever seen on the variety stage.

It was extraordinary how retentive her memory was. Without knowing it, she never forgot anything that she had once heard. In her normal condition she remembered less than other people. Wine had first to sweep away the barriers of reserve which, as a rule, dammed her flow of wit.

Her associates soon discovered this phenomenal peculiarity in her, and tried by a hundred devices to bring her into a condition that provided them with such rare entertainment. But she resisted with all her strength, and so she waged a perpetual warfare in which she could not count on Richard as an ally, for he liked his fair mistress to be applauded for her talent as well as admired for her beauty.

The next day she invariably felt limp and depressed, and sometimes when her mind's horizon was bounded by a red forest of high kicking legs, and the silly patter of suggestive songs rang in her head, a low voice of exhortation made itself heard within her. "*Once you were different.*" it said. "*Once you looked up to the heights and aspired to better things.*" But she dared not listen to this voice. . . . She felt she was unworthy because she was defenceless and had no one to hold out to her a protecting hand.

Sometimes, on the nights that she was free to do as she pleased, she slipped out, as if she were doing something wrong, and went to the gallery of a good theatre where she would not be known, or to the orchestra of a concert-hall where music students of both sexes congregated, sitting on steps and railings with the score on their knees, following every note.

What she saw and heard made no deep impression on her. She felt disquieted and out of her element, and fixed her attention on some young man, whose bold profile or mass of artistic curls struck her fancy.

"He is one of the gifted," she thought, with a torturing pain at her heart, and she gazed at him so long and earnestly with languishing eyes that at last he returned her glance with fiery fervour.

Yet, however hotly she might burn with eagerness to be spoken to by him, she dared not give him further signals of encouragement, with Frau Julia's awful example before her mind's eye. . . . And so she had to rest content with the beating of her heart, which in itself alone caused her delight.

So steeped was she now in the erotics of the world she moved in, that the slightest rise in the temperature of passion was interpreted by her as a complete drama of love and longing. Oh, the longing, that eternal gnawing toothache, to which Frau Julia had referred; how well she knew what it was now! It had come on her like a thief in the night, filling her hours of rest with a panorama of flaming visions, changing her waking hours into a drowsy trance.

She waited, and no one came. No one took the trouble to lift her lost soul out of the dust. Only one person, who watched her keenly, appeared to have any conception of what was going on within her.

This was Dr. Salmoni.

A great man was Dr. Salmoni in the estimation of those intellectual circles in Berlin of which he was a luminary. He was the editor of an art magazine once notorious for its revolutionary doctrines and the zeal with which it attacked the great gods of the old school, and set up new idols for the multitude to worship. But it was not Dr. Salmoni's way to burn incense long at any shrine; when he saw the mob kneeling before the fetishes of his own creation, he tore them down, too, and ground them under the heel of his vituperative invective. His hate was a thing to be lightly borne, his witticisms fizzled out and did not hurt, no one believed his calumnies. More dangerous was the benevolent kindness which he expended on all those whose reputation he intended to ruin. Praise from Dr. Salmoni sounded like a death-sentence in certain ears.

This distinguished man now, as in former winters, patronised occasionally the harmless amusements of the little circle whose strong point could hardly be called intellect. His appearance was hailed with respectful enthusiasm; everyone made room for him, and hung on his lips in anticipation of scathing personal remarks when he leaned back in his chair with his melancholy sympathetic smile and stroked his pointed reddish beard. But he did not always fill the rôle of jester expected of him. He would sometimes engage in a *tête-à-tête* conversation, or sit alone, lost in silent meditation.

He could even show, when he liked, a playful *naïveté*, such as a leopard displays when it gambols with puppies. He seldom spoke to Lilly. But his penetrating eyes often wandered over her face with a scrutinising glance. She felt every time he did this that he amused himself by skimming the emotions of her soul.

One evening he sat down next her, and asked if she would cut up his meat for him, as he had unfortunately sprained his wrist in strangling a certain celebrity. . . . Next, in growing intimacy, he desired her to feed him, which he might easily have done himself with his left hand, which was not disabled.

Thus they found themselves conversing seriously for the first time. Lilly trembled at the honour. She was afraid of not distinguishing herself.

"I am quite astonished," he said, "that, after knocking about with this ribald crew for over two years, your eyes do not betray you."

"How should they?" she asked.

"Kindly look one moment at the women collected here"—and he indicated with his finger Frau Julia, Welter, and Karla, and two or three more. "How they roll their eyes! how they look up under them! All that is the lingo of . . . I was going to say vice; but I detest expressions that are so guiltless of nuances, so I will say instead, the lingo of a criminal phantasy. Do you understand?"

"I think so," murmured Lilly.

"Now you, my dearest lady, still retain something of the childlike innocence of former years in your glance. Not all, but something. A *soupeçon* of contempt has crept in. No, contempt is not exactly the right word. On the outskirts of deserts there are certain salt pools that are green, dark, and

empty, because the ground is poisoned. Do you grasp what I mean ? ”

“ I’m not sure that I do,” she said.

“ All the same, it’s marvellous. Your soul seems to be a filter ; it only assimilates what it likes. Or perhaps you have a private source of succour to draw on that puts you on a higher plane than us, some crystallised immovable ideal . . . some fixed star to shoot at . . . some sublime Song of Songs.”

Lilly started so violently that a low cry escaped her lips, loud enough, however, to attract the eyes of the company towards her.

“ I have only trodden on this lady’s foot,” explained Dr. Salmoni, “ and she was ingenuous enough to think I did it by mistake.”

Everyone laughed.

“ A joke sufficiently clumsy to satisfy them,” he said in a whisper, leaning close to her shoulder. “ I’ll make believe not to have heard your involuntary confession. I only value intended avowals. I am not going to ask you to-night, as I asked you once before, what you are doing here. I ask instead : What have you got to lose here ? And I can give the answer myself directly : Your style—your style stands in peril. You are on the brink of losing your style, and becoming guiltless of style, and that is a misfortune and a crime at the same moment. Style is to me equivalent to virtue, greatness, sincerity, religion, power, and a few other things all combined—a divine quality. Keep to your last, spiritually and physically. There is *line* in that ; an excellent thing to preserve. Swing yourself up, if you like, to the peaks of a healthy and joyous viciousness—*tant mieux*. You can either dress your hair like a nun’s or let it float over the pillow like a bacchante’s—but be sure which you decide on.”

“ I think just now that you pleaded the cause of nuances,” Lilly said, feeling her wits sharpened by his, “ and now you are talking platitudes.”

“ Hear, hear,” he answered approvingly. “ That’s capital ! But no, no, dear gracious one ; I am not talking platitudes. I preach simply, ‘ *Will*,’ the will to personality. In truth, there’s room for plenty of nuances. You have the stuff in you for a *grande amoureuse* ; but, alas ! not the courage.”

"And that shows I haven't the stuff," she retorted, giving him a radiant look.

He laughed like a schoolboy. "Yes, yes. We all get old sometime, and listen to little virtuous women lecturing us on logic."

And he chivalrously allowed her the satisfaction of having got the best of him in repartee.

During the next few days Lilly reflected a good deal on what they had talked about. How could he know so much about her? It was almost as if he were in league with supernatural agencies. "Will to personality," he had said. The phrase made her happy. Once more she began to ascend to the heights.

Another time, when they followed a party of their friends at midnight along the lively Friedrichstrasse, he adopted a different tone.

"I have a queer sort of feeling, dearest lady," he said, "that you are afraid of me."

"I?" she said, catching her breath nervously. "Why should I be afraid of you?"

"Because you know that I have a message for you. A message of redemption for which in your secret heart you don't feel ready."

"I don't understand you," she faltered. But she understood perfectly what he would say. She knew what part he might play in her life if——

"I am a man tuned in a minor key," he continued. "I don't like playing my emotions on a trumpet, otherwise your ears might have tingled ere this. Anyhow, I will say this, that I think it a scandal that a woman like you, made to walk in high places, one capable of noble thought and elevated enjoyments, should be bribed by a few pickled herrings into living a stupid burlesque of a life. . . . I am not going to blame anyone, but, my dearest lady, I assure you it is impossible to drain life's ecstasy to the dregs in lukewarm dish-water . . . and, after all, intoxication is the main thing, so long as the blood leaps in our veins."

Lilly trembled on his arm. They overtook a throng of gay night-revellers—young fellows who were shouldering their walking-sticks, and looking dreamily before them with dizzy eyes. One whistled Wagner, another sang a student's

song. Pretty women of the town, coming towards them, gave them alluring glances from dark-rimmed, passion-lit eyes . . . more followed, youths and men, girls little more than children, all infected by the same transports. It was like a figure in a sylvan dance in which everyone offered each other hand and mouth, body and soul.

"What am I to do?" she asked in a low tone, dropping her chin on her heaving breast.

"I'll tell you," he answered, with a smile which concealed dark hints. "You must learn to lead another life at the same time as this one—a life that belongs to you alone . . . you and a few choice friends. Do you understand? You must do what a Frenchman once advised: lay out a secret garden, in which you tend in peace all your favourite thoughts and wishes. Above all, the things that are forbidden, and which you have privily gathered together. . . . Do you understand?"

"All forbidden things have brought me unhappiness," she said hesitatingly.

"You mean that the law that forbids them has made you unhappy," he replied; "it's not easy to distinguish between the two. At all events, believe this, my dear child: that until we make self-culture a religion, till we have erased the little word 'duty' from our vocabulary, we are not on the right road. We are simply bruising our feet by stumbling over the *débris* with which others block our way under the pretext of making it smooth for us."

"But sometimes they do make it smooth," she answered, thinking of all the benefits she had received at Richard's hands.

He smiled at her with indulgent pity. "You seem to be suffering from a sickness that I call 'chain-madness,'" he said.

"What is that?" Lilly asked again, seized with a dismayed suspicion that he possessed some occult power, and that he divined the shameful part certain chains had played in her life.

"It is said," he continued, "that slaves who have worked in the galleys for years, when they are liberated, miss their chains, and complain loudly that their legs and arms feel as if they were chopped off. . . . Your beautiful arms, dear lady, were made to stretch upwards. Why don't you exercise them more?"



"And my long legs were made for running away," she supplemented with a tortured laugh. "Only, where am I to run to? that is the question."

"Why be in such a hurry and talk of running away yet?" he asked, stroking the hand lying in his arm, as if he were talking to a child. "You'd only run into the arms of another so-called 'duty.' First, you must acquire inward freedom—first you must forget how to be at the beck and call of those who themselves should be under command."

"Teach me the way," she burst out.

"I will lend you a few books," he said, as if deliberating. . . . "Books that will lead you back to yourself. Tomorrow morning I will——"

At this moment they were separated.

That night Lilly, when in bed, lay with folded hands smiling up at the ceiling. Was she not once more ascending to the heights?

The next day, as the time for his call drew near, she was overcome by a new dread. She was afraid of him, of Richard, of herself.

This would be the first visit she had received in secret, the first to break up the tranquillity of her home. So, when she beheld him get out of a cab with several books under his arm, she ran to give instructions not to let him in.

When he had gone she pounced eagerly on the books that he had left for her. Some were printed in Roman characters and looked at a first glance terribly scientific. But they proved readable. She dipped first into one, and then into another, and what she read made her blood flame and rise to her head like sweet wine.

In all, there was a great deal about the "power to will," the "super-man," the "right to live," and the "gospel of passion." In all, the purely beautiful was lauded as the end and aim of human endeavour. In all, the word "individuality" occurred over and over again, and in every conceivable connection. They all taught you to look down with vindictive pride on your fellow-creatures, and to despise them as a debased, tortured, and enslaved race. You wandered in glorious isolation, accompanied, perhaps, now and then by one or two kindred souls of lofty superiority, on storm-swept mountain-tops, breathing an eternally rarefied ether.

In these pages was an unending offering-up of incense to self, an insatiable self-conceit, a glorification of murder and arson, pæans sung on such themes as lusts of the flesh, chambering and wantonness.

Thus Lilly's soul became enveloped in a veil of intoxication and ravishing dreams. She felt as if she were seated in a sapphire-blue haze, which a far-off glow shot with purple threads. She heard music, hot and wild, storming on in angry dissonances like armies of mænads tearing down all obstacles in their way. She felt herself climbing steep craggy rocks, getting higher and ever higher. She fought against dizziness, and dared not look back for fear of being dashed to pieces in the abyss below. But she did not lose her footing; she cut and tore her hands in clinging to the sharp edges and swinging herself up—up! Now she was at the top and laughed. Oh, how she laughed down on the poor scum of humanity who crept about down there in misery and wretchedness, letting themselves be trampled on and crushed for the sake of their crumbs of daily bread! . . . And then, again, a great pity overwhelmed her. Why should she alone stand on these wild, gold-shrouded summits, while all those others had no prospect of a near salvation? She would have liked to hold out her hand to her poor oppressed and hungry brothers and sisters, and help them to climb up too. But they would not be able to understand her or her message of redemption. Yes, that was what *he* had called it, a "message of redemption." She saw their emaciated faces wet with the cold sweat of death, their glazed fixed eyes, that still could not turn their gaze from the glittering coin of their wretched living wage. She saw women in the last stage of pregnancy, thin and distended at the same time. She thought of the poor factory girl in Richard's packing-room, whose feverish hands made the doll that she wrapped in paper sway and dance. She thought of the others who had glanced at her with shy hate and hopeless envy in their weary eyes.

Once more her affection for the factory, which she supposed on the day of her shame and humiliation had received its death-blow, awoke within her with a tender sadness, like the trembling hope of spring in our souls when the February snows begin to melt.

This had certainly not been the object of Dr. Salmoni's loan of books. Nevertheless, they discharged their mission

He walked beside her with an elastic, somewhat jumpy step. His cane, the knob of which he held in his pocket, flicked his shoulder. His white silk muffler gleamed, and that was all she could see of him. He talked on and on. How he talked ! Often she felt as if she were being slapped, oftener as if she were caressed. When Richard and his friends were the target of his jeers, she would gladly have contradicted him ; but he mentioned no names, and, after all, she had often thought the same.

Tentatively he played on her aristocratic antecedents. He depicted scenes from country life, and said there was no pleasure to equal rides *à deux* in the rosy freshness of early morning. It seemed as if he had been present at everything she had ever done.

" I have lived a great deal in castles," he said, in explanation. " I know the life well."

Her past, too, it would seem. So he went on searching into her soul. When he began to speak of the books which he had lent her, without commenting on her refusal to see him the morning he called, she made a mild protest.

" Pray never lend me any more of the same kind ! " she implored.

" Why not ? "

" They puzzle me and make me ill. . . . I don't know how to describe it. You said they would help me to find myself . . . but, on the contrary, they seem to estrange me from everything that I had always thought before was pure and holy."

" Perhaps that is so," he replied, and his walking-stick danced ; " perhaps this is the first step that I demand of you in the ascent to a higher life. . . . By-the-by, let me tell you a little story that comes in *à propos* here. There were once two old zealous missionaries who were conscientiously fired with the desire to spread Christianity in Central Africa. . . . Such freaks are really quite superfluous, but they exist, and we have to put up with them. In order to render their work of conversion the more solemn and convincing, they took with them a small portable organ. They dragged it, sweating, hundreds of miles, through deadly tropical heat into the heart of the interior, where the poor naked savages resided, on whom they had designs. There they set up the organ and started their services, but no sooner had the poor naked savages heard

the first notes than they took their cudgels and brained the two zealous missionaries, because of the evil spirits shut up in the musical-box. In the same manner life deals with us, my dear lady, when we try to play it on the good old organ of our exploded moral prejudices."

Lilly felt powerless to cope with such an overmastering intellect. In silent submission she bowed her head. And as he now, without asking her consent, laid her hand in his arm, she dared not withdraw it. They passed grimy factory walls, the dreary blackness of which was here and there illumined by the milky blue light of a lamp-post, scaffoldings stretched skeleton arms against the lurid cloudy sky, and now and then they heard the bells of the electric trams as they ran along parallel routes.

"Where are we going?" she asked nervously.

"We are avoiding human society," he answered. "And if I were to take advantage of the present situation, I should profit by your feeling lost and in need of my protection. But I am not a designing nature. In all that concerns the emotions I am a mere babe. . . . I simply take what heaven lets fall. Are not you constituted in the same way?"

"No, I am too stolid and heavy," she said, ready to open her heart to him. "I think over things ever so much."

"It depends what you think," he said gaily.

She wanted to speak out, to tell him everything, and she felt as if she must lay her heart on his open palm so that nothing should be hidden from him. But humility and awe of his stupendous cleverness sealed her lips.

"Why do you trouble yourself about an idiot like me?" she asked, in order to show at least how humble she was.

"Because I may have a mission to fulfil in your life," he answered. "*Perhaps*, I say, for one never can tell what reflex action of the emotions may bring about. Certain psychological moments will show us."

She did not understand the meaning behind this remark, but a timid feeling of happiness that so infinitely great a man should be generously interested in her crept over her.

"You are in his power," she thought; "he can make of you anything he likes."

As he drew her arm a little closer to his her pressure in response brought his hand for a moment in contact with her bosom. She was overcome with terror that he might think

she was throwing herself at his head. What if she went home with him, that he asked her . . .

"I will take the tram," she said hurriedly. "I am tired."

He whistled for a cab, which was approaching out of the fog.

"No, no!" she cried, with no other thought than that of preserving the gift of his friendship as it was, intact. "Not with you. I must go home alone. You know what people are; besides . . ."

She wrenched her arm out of his, and ran to the next stopping place so quickly that he could scarcely follow her before she had jumped on the first car that came up. The smile with which he looked after her was, however, not a disappointed one.

He intended to triumph and would triumph.

Lilly Czepanek was once more travelling upwards to the heights.

Three days later they met again, but this time at a large social gathering. The party had come from a *café chantant* in the northern part of the town, and were to wind up the evening in the private back room of a middle-class public-house.

By an unlucky chance the seat she had carefully kept for him by her side fell to someone else's share. This put her out; but there was champagne to cheer up everyone.

Lilly, out of defiance and boredom, drank far more than was good for her. Her eyes began to blaze with a challenging merriment; her cheeks took on the rosy-apple hue which all her friends delighted in. Her laughter became shriller, her movements more and more animated. Suddenly there was a loud call for "Lilly." Lilly was to perform.

Her heart misgave her. Not once, as yet, had she dared to recite in his presence. Indeed, no one had thought of asking her when he was of the company, for he was always the centre of attraction. Then she felt, "To-day I can do anything—to-day I will show him what there is in me."

She stood up, tossed back the hair from her forehead, and shook herself . . . shook off every vestige of the everyday Lilly; the Lilly subject to fits of depression and faint-heartedness; the vacillating, inanimate Lilly. . . . Now she was off. She first plunged into an imitation of "La belle Otero," and crowed and whooped so that her audience laughed

till it cried. . . . Then she mimicked a star of the cabarets, . . . sucked her thumb in babylike simplicity and piped, "Let me in, I say, into your room to-day." In a comical double-bass she growled, "An ambassador would a-wooing go." Half-hidden behind the hatstand she cooed the song of the passionate love-pigeon, "Gurr . . . gurr . . . keak." Finally they begged her to dance. At first she protested, but in vain; she had to give in. Tables and chairs were moved out of the way, and making her own dance-music between her teeth, she whirled madly round the room, till half-fainting she collapsed into a corner.

The applause seemed as if it would never stop. The women devoured her with kisses, the men stroked her arms and hair, and Richard stood silent and pale with pride, in his Napoleonic attitude, and gnawed his moustache ends. Dr. Salmoni, however, kept in the background, smiled a melancholy modest smile, and looked as if he had nothing on earth to do with what had passed. Only one brief glance of understanding, that he threw at her like a laurel-wreath, told her that he knew for whom she had let herself go. When the party broke up, she was still glowing with ecstasy from head to foot.

Yes! this was the genuine intoxication, of the charms of which he had lately spoken to her; it was like a hissing flame darting through your heart and limbs.

It was he who helped her on with her fur coat, for Richard was engaged in paying the bill; and while he carefully placed the sable boa round her shoulders, he whispered close to her ear, "May I call to-morrow?"

"Yes," she said, terrified at herself; and then, in defiance of her own cowardice, she turned brusquely on her heel and shouted back in his face four or five times, as if in wrath, "Yes, yes, yes, yes!"

"What is the matter with her?" people asked each other.

But she laughed a short, hard laugh. What did she care for them? Was she not once more scaling the heights?

The next morning all seemed like a fantastic dream. Only one fact stood out clearly. He was coming to call!

She stretched herself in shy conceit as the applause of last night echoed in her ears. Now he knew what she was. No dull, tame, half-developed creature; no servile, sheep-like

nature, whose fixed horror of fate made her the voluntary slave of every convention. But, on the contrary, a free, proud, luminous super-being, one of those perfectly complete, mænad-like women who dance on the edge of precipices and mock at death, even when he holds them in his clutches.

Then she became faint-hearted once more. After all, what was there to boast of in having sung a few songs and danced an outrageous dance under the influence of champagne? She had only behaved like a common music-hall diva, and reaped the undesirable plaudits of a half-inebriated audience! Was that all one had to do to belong to the elect, the laughter-loving, powerful souls of Dr. Salmoni's literature?

No, oh no! that could not be the key! After such an exhibition he would feel nothing but scorn or, at best, pity for her. . . . And if he came to-day it would be only to tell her what he thought of her. He would show her how degraded she was, and then benevolently go his way quite unconcerned.

She wouldn't endure that. She would cling to him, and cry, "You have promised to lead me to the heights out of this barren miserable existence. Now keep your word! Don't forsake me. I'll do everything you wish. I will be your slave, your dog; only don't forsake me."

In feverish expectation she dressed, waved her hair, reddened the lips that dissipation had paled, and altogether made herself as beautiful as possible.

Towards twelve there was a ring. Was it he?

No; instead of Dr. Salmoni, Frau Julia had come to call. What did she want all of a sudden? They had, as if by mutual agreement, avoided each other since that evening of confidences. And here she was now, without even going through the formality of being announced! Her air was cordial, almost affectionate, and she craved a chat.

Lilly hesitated.

"I won't keep you long, my sweet one. I can see you are expecting a visitor."

"I didn't know that I was," she said, conscious that she blushed.

"Don't deny it, dear. . . . I know that Dr. Salmoni is coming. . . . I know, too, exactly how you feel. I, too, have gone through it, and stood, getting pale and pink in turns, as I watched for him. . . . My morning dress, certainly, was not such a ravishing reseda as yours; it was

only claret colour . . . but that is all the same ; he doesn't mind us in claret colour."

"What do you imply by that ? " faltered Lilly.

"What do I imply ? . . . Why, simply this. Our circle for Dr. Salmoni is a kind of fish-pond of pretty light women, in which he angles from time to time, till he hooks something that his appetite fancies. At present he is hooking you, my dearest."

"That is slander !" cried Lilly, flaring up. "He has never made love to me, nor has such a thing been even mentioned between us."

"Because it isn't necessary," replied Frau Julia ; and she laughed maliciously. "The man does not trouble himself with such trifling preliminaries. He knows that at the right moment we shall rise to his bait."

Lilly felt herself getting more and more angry.

"Between him and me nothing has passed but discussions on purely intellectual subjects, such as a freer, prouder, and higher human ideal ; and if you, and people like you, can't understand such language ; if you are too——"

"Stop, my dear, please," said Frau Julia. "Don't be insulting ! There is no occasion. I have come to you with the best intentions. For anyone else I would not have taken the trouble ; I should only have smacked my lips. But *you*—well, I am fond of you, even if you prefer to have nothing to do with me. And you he shall leave alone. And yesterday, when I saw that what a pass things had come, I could give myself no peace. . . . I felt compelled to come . . . before it was too late."

"But, indeed, you are mistaken," said Lilly ; nevertheless, she cast an anxious look at the clock.

Frau Julia, whom this did not escape, made a grimace.

"Directly there's a ring, I'll slip out through the next room, but by that time I shall have achieved my object, I hope. . . . You see, child"—she sank into the sofa-corner and drew Lilly down beside her—"we poor women have all longed to raise ourselves again, so long as we were pretty faithful to one person. . . . And then Dr. Salmoni enters. He has to angle longer for some of us than others, but he doesn't mind how cheaply he gets us. He has, too, various baits. For a cold-blooded lump like Karla he doesn't go the same way to work as with us, naturally. With us he begins



in this way : ' My gracious one, I am always amazed to find you in such an environment as this. Tell me, what are you doing here ? ' "

Lilly looked startled.

" Well, was that it ? or wasn't it ? "

" Yes, but . . . "

" It was. That's enough. Next comes his depicting of the dangers we encounter if we continue to live in bondage. . . . He is especially down on duty. Duty he can't tolerate ; it is obnoxious to him. As if we were so terribly particular about our little bit of duty, forsooth ! Now then, wasn't that it ? Am I not right ? "

" Yes, but . . . " stammered Lilly.

" I thought so. And next he says *he* wants to set us free . . . to lead us upwards on high. He is the personal conductor to the heights. Isn't it so ? "

Lilly turned her head aside to conceal the blush of shame that suffused her neck and face.

" And then the books ! Wretched trash written by little raw scribblers in imitation of our great Nietzsche ! But we all fall into the trap ; it works up our blood like cayenne pepper ; we get quite maudlin over it. What enrages us afterwards is that we were actually such geese as to believe in his scoundrelly sentiment, although the scurviest cynicism exudes from all his pores. But one is so stupid, and he is so clever. Yes, to give the devil his due, he is clever."

" But how does he manage it ? " asked Lilly, who dared no longer stand up for him. " How does he seem to know everything about your past, as if he had lived it with you ? "

" Yes, child, it's strange. But, you know, people whose circumstances are the same generally have the same experiences. It is easy enough for him to reconstruct our past when we tell him we've lived in the country. I am a landed-proprietor's daughter. Didn't he, by-the-by, tell you he had passed much of his time in castles ? "

Lilly nodded.

" That's because he—I found it all out later—was tutor to some Jews who rented a place near Breslau ; but they soon gave him the sack for his impudence."

In the midst of her agony of disillusionment Lilly could not help laughing shrilly.

" That's capital ! " her friend approved. " You can think

yourself fortunate. If only someone had come and warned me! for afterwards, how it hurts!"

"What happens afterwards?" Lilly asked, hesitating.

"It's very simple *afterwards*. When he's got what he wants, it's over. He buttons up his coat, says in a voice of deep emotion, '*Au revoir*'; but it never comes, his *au revoir*. You never see him again."

"That isn't true; it can't be true!" cried Lilly in horror. "Surely no man can be such a cur to a woman!"

"You—never—see—him—again," repeated Frau Julia. "Why should you? The creature has other matters of more importance to attend to. I wrote my fingers to the bone. Not a line in response! . . . There's no getting at him. Frau Welter lay on his doorstep, Karla got the jaundice from fury, and so on. But the man's an eel. Later, if you meet him at a carousal, there's not the faintest recollection in his eyes . . . he just treats you as he treats the rest."

Startled, Lilly recalled how she too had adopted a like course of action, and appeared at a carousal without betraying the slightest memory of what had passed before, although he had turned on her petitioning tragi-comical glances. Yes, everyone was as bad as everyone else in this world, in which one cast off one's dignity like a worn-out dress. She buried her face in the sofa-corner, overcome with shame and consciousness of guilt.

"Never mind," comforted Frau Julia. "It's all right now." And then there was a ring.

Lilly rushed to the door to give instructions as before, that she was "not at home," but Frau Julia restrained her.

"What are you thinking about?" she whispered. "Don't let him think you are afraid of him. If you do, you won't be rid of him for a long time. You must laugh at him. Do you understand? Laugh at him pitilessly with all your might."

Lilly would have liked her to stay and help her out, but she had already slipped away. Could she possibly outwit him single-handed? . . . He was now in the room. Drawn to her full height, she received him as a deadly enemy.

"My dearest child," he said, and kissed the hand which she quickly drew away from him.

He was very choicely dressed. He wore straw-coloured gloves, and held his silk hat against his breast. His eye glass danced on his white waistcoat.

A serene self-confidence, an air of supreme mastery of the situation, illumined his person like an aureole. The manner in which he nestled comfortably against the cushions of his chair, and crossed his legs with easy self-assurance, showed plainly that he regarded her as his certain prey.

Lilly was no longer nervous and in doubt. Her soreness of heart and disappointment had vanished. She felt nothing but a cold calculating curiosity. She followed his every movement with calm amazement, as he passed his hand over his glossy bushy hair and hitched up his trousers to display his silk socks with red clocks. And all the time she kept saying to herself, "So this is what you are! This!"

And then he began to talk in his low deliberate caressing voice, while his piercing eyes wandered up and down her. "You are excited, my dear child, and I am not astonished. When two people such as we are find themselves for the first time absolutely alone together, they are apt to betray their emotions. Don't be ashamed of yours. . . . The tie that has bound us together is so subtle and delicate an understanding—the magnetic fluid between us is of such a rare and fleeting nature——" "Yes, very fleeting," thought Lilly—— "that it really would be a pity if we did not taste and enjoy it to the dregs. Any restraint of feeling might easily prove a hindrance on your side, as well as on my own, to the full rapture of this hour of spiritual hedonism."

He almost smacked his lips as he said this, and rocked from side to side. Lilly thought of the refrain of a Viennese song in her repertoire: "I have much too much feeling."

"He has much too much," she said to herself, and she could not help a smile flitting across her face.

He saw the smile, which she tried to hide by bending her head, and he misinterpreted it.

"There is a delightful virginal coyness about you," he said, with an admiring oscillation of his head, "that never fails to excite my wonder."

"Oh, you mountebank!" thought Lilly, and smiled again.

Now he was slightly perplexed, for his wide and varied experience had taught him something. He shot at her from under his lids a glance of suspicion and thwarted greed.

"Or have you," he continued, "kept over for to-day some of the charmingly graceful humour which you developed last night with such unexpected *élan*?"

"I may have," she replied, with an upward glance which was almost arch.

"Most excellent!" he cried, his face breaking into a roguish smile in which there was a touch of devilry. "Are you, then, one of those who know how to laugh in your sleeve at—how shall I express it?—the whole farce and hypocrisy of it all : . . . at yourself too, my child—at yourself, mind ; that is the main point. . . . If so, you and I are one, one in body and soul ; . . . nothing divides us any more . . . then . . ."

"God forgive me!" she thought, and held her handkerchief pressed against her lips to stop her giggling. Had not Frau Julia said, "Laugh at him ; laugh at him pitilessly with all your might" ?

For his part he seemed to accept her suppressed laughter as an allurements, a gentle signal to cut short ceremonious preliminaries, for he chose this moment for springing at her and laying his arms about her waist.

She repulsed his attack fiercely and struggled with him. Tears of humiliation and fury coursed down her cheeks.

"Have I come to this ?" a voice cried within her as she struck at him with her fists. In the midst of the tussle she succeeded in reaching the bell.

The maid-servant came in. He picked up his hat from the floor and, murmuring something that sounded like "*Canaille!*" disappeared.

He disappeared too for ever from the little circle, which he had at times honoured with his presence.

Lilly gave up attempting to scale the heights.

## CHAPTER XI

**D**URING the year that followed, Lilly engaged in two small love adventures, which had no influence on her subsequent life.

While she was staying for a month's change of air in the Riesengebirge she came across a novelist whose name at that time was in everybody's mouth. He was parading his newly acquired fame at the Bohemian bathing resorts, and accepted cheerfully any good thing that came in his way. He forced his acquaintance on Lilly without much difficulty, and in a few days left her in search of fresh conquests.

Back in Berlin, she flirted with a handsome and elegant officer of the Hussars whom she had first met in an aristocratic restaurant. But on his sending her a little leather case from a jeweller's, she speedily threw him over.

Both these affairs gave her no pleasure to look back upon, and she tried to erase them from her memory.

At Christmas her little household was increased by a new member. She had often complained to Richard that her life was empty of interest. She would like something alive to pet and cherish and love, and so one day he brought her a little naked monkey, that even when he nestled close to her breast could not get warm, and in his wrath spat in her face scorn of her yearning caresses.

From time to time there was the excitement, too, of new marriage schemes.

How well she knew the signs! When Richard, with scowling brows, absent-minded, and taciturn, made the tour of the rooms, when he began to philosophise over the rottenness of everything, when his mother wanted the carriage at unwonted hours, when little packets of concert and opera tickets fell out of his pocket-book, then she knew

that something was going on out of the ordinary routine. And soon he would break silence and tell her what it was. One of them had three millions, influential relatives, mines, factories, trusts, house property, making up a dazzling perspective. Often figures were talked in Lilly's corner drawing-room to such an extent that it might have been the office of an outside stockbroker. Another eligible young woman was actually poor, but she was a general's daughter, and his mother thought no end of her.

"And I am a general's widow," said Lilly, in her wounded pride.

This church mouse he called his "distinguished lady-love." But it went no further. She and all the rest were soon heard no more of, because none of them turned out in the end to be good enough for him.

Lilly meditated and planned what she must be like. . . . She must have white, softly rounded statuesque arms like the tall Danish girl's at the artists' carnival, and a very delicate, scarcely perceptible bust—her own seemed to her now to be too prominent—and when she smiled she must show two dimples in her cheeks; for dimples denoted a peaceable disposition.

Yes, that was what he wanted more than anything—peace. She knew how he hated wrangling, and, as a matter of fact, they hardly ever did wrangle, but, if such a thing as a little quarrel did occur, he would be miserable for three days, speak in a woebegone, injured tone, and had to be coaxed back to good temper like a child. And Lilly enjoyed doing this, though she knew he did not deserve it. For there was no blinking the matter any longer; he had become a regular reprobate. It was not so much that he had lost enormous sums at his club, but he led the debauched existence of the fastest married man, and his amours were not of the purest.

One day a pretty young thing, with a baby eight weeks old in her arms, called on Lilly, screamed and cried and declared that she ought to be promoted to Lilly's place, as she had a child by him.

Lilly consoled her, gave her some wine to drink, and, full of envy of the baby, tickled it under its damp little chin till it gurgled with bliss; whereupon the girl departed, deeply touched, after kissing Lilly's hand gratefully.

Richard, however, came in for no unpleasant scene that

afternoon, for Lilly was entirely free from jealousy. When he came to her, looking sheepish, and avoided meeting her eyes, while his person exhaled an odour of cheap perfume, she always gave him a smile of maternal indulgence, which he well understood and couldn't bear.

However determined he might be to keep silent, he invariably broke down at last, and in about half an hour had poured out shuffling confessions, for which he expected to be praised or comforted.

It was inevitable that Lilly, in an existence of this sort, in which were rampant all the evils of married life, without any of its rights and dignity, should become more and more self-centred, and look forward to the future with increasing sadness.

She passed her days as if seated on a bough which every gust of wind threatened to snap, and so plunge her into the depths below. Before her lay a straight, dull, endless road, stretching onwards without goal, without horizon—nothing but the same old pleasures, the same aimless wandering about from one haunt to another till morning dawned. Often she felt as tired out as if she had been doing hard manual labour. Sometimes she struck, and lay the whole day in bed reading *Fliegende Blätter*, or dreaming of old days with closed eyes.

The sunless hole of the widow Asmussen's library came back to her like a paradise, and the milk puddings in retrospect seemed veritable ambrosia. The memory of her early loves she scarcely dared conjure up, as if it were sacrilege to think of them in such a present. Yet she caught herself indulging in vague hopes that one or other of them might one day turn up out of the past, and, holding his hand out to her, say, "You have wandered long enough in the wilderness, now come home." Who it would be she hadn't a notion, but she felt it must happen. Things could not go on like this for ever.

Every now and then, when secret restlessness gave her no peace, she resumed her nocturnal strolls, and taking the electric tram to distant suburbs would wander guiltily up and down unfamiliar lively streets, just as Frau Julia did; only, unlike Frau Julia, she never could bring herself to answer her pursuers.

It was on one of these expeditions—in a northerly direction far away beyond the Rosental gate—that one May evening she met a young man who did not take any notice of her,

who also did not look like a gentleman, but whose appearance struck her as familiar—so familiar that it gave her a stab at the heart.

Yet, though she racked her brains, she could not recall where she had seen him before.

With quick decision she began to follow him. He wore a brown hat, a pepper-and-salt suit with a yellowish tinge, which had known better days. His coat-collar was shiny, and his trousers were very baggy at the knees. They hung over his down-at-heel boots in fringes, as if someone had tried to mend them, and left black uneven ends of cotton.

No, this could not be one of her friends even in disguise. Her friends would never own to such trousers. He paused once or twice to look in at the shop-windows. First, he looked in at a cigar-shop, then at a butcher's; but he lingered longest before a hosier's, from which Lilly concluded that his shirts also were in need of renewal.

When he thus gave her a view of his profile, she saw in the reflection of the rows of lights a haggard, bony face, with prominent nose, and a tuft of reddish-brown hair on either side of his chin. He seemed to be dried up and needy, rather than actually ill. The lids of his small, narrow eyes were swollen and inflamed, and before coming within the radius of shop-window lights, he clapped a pair of dark-blue goggles on his nose to protect them.

He had a cane in his hand, which as he walked he pressed into a bow against the kerb, letting it rebound again. The silver knob of this cane, which matched ill with the shabbiness of his attire, somehow awoke recollections of a frosty morning, hot rolls, and church bells.

She gave an exclamation, for she remembered now. Fritz Redlich it was—Fritz Redlich! Yes, it was; it was!

There could be no further doubt. Her first love, her first lover . . . her brave young champion in life's battle. Hers and St. Joseph's protégé!

Oh dear, yes, St. Joseph! And then the revolver! And the potato soup with sliced sausage! Oh! . . . and "The graves at Ottensen"!

"Herr Redlich! Herr Redlich!"

Trembling and laughing she stood behind him, holding out her two hands to the young man, who shrank back nervously.

He dropped his goggles and gazed blankly at the tall,



elegantly dressed lady, from behind whose lace veil two star-like, tear-filled eyes gave him a blissful greeting. His red lids blinked suspiciously; then he raised his left hand with a clumsy gesture to his hat brim.

"But, Herr Redlich . . . Don't you know me? I am Lilly—Lilly Czepanek. Don't you remember Lilly?"

Yes, now he remembered. "Of course," he said, "why shouldn't I remember you?"

At the same moment he pulled down his waistcoat with a stealthy jerk, as if to rectify as best he could the shortcomings of his personal appearance.

"Oh, Herr Redlich, what a long time it is since we've met! It must, I think, be six or eight years. No, it can't be as long; and yet to me it seems longer. Things have gone well with you, I hope? I expect you are terribly busy, otherwise we might spend a little time together."

He certainly was busy, but, in spite of that, if she liked, he could spare her a quarter of an hour.

"Shall we go into a restaurant," she suggested, still half-crying and half-laughing, "and have a glass of beer? I can hardly believe it, Herr Redlich, that we've really met again."

He had decided objections to the glass of beer.

"Restaurants are so stuffy and crowded," he said, "and the beer about here is so bad—not fit to drink."

"Poor fellow! He's too poor to pay for it," she thought; and she suggested that they should sit down on a seat somewhere instead.

He didn't mind doing that so long as . . . He glanced shyly to the right and left to see if anyone had remarked what a badly matched couple they were.

They walked side by side along the more secluded Weinsberg path. Lilly kept looking at him with pride and emotion, as if she had created him out of space.

"Dear, dear Herr Redlich," she reiterated "is it possible?—is it possible?"

Then they found a bench outside a church, in a dusky spot, overhung with lilac branches. A pair of lovers had just vacated it.

"Now tell me everything, Herr Redlich. Oh dear, what a lot we have to tell each other!"

"There is a good deal," he replied, hesitating; "perhaps the gracious baroness will begin?"

"Pooh! I am not a 'gracious baroness' now, and haven't been for a long time."

"Ah! so I think I have heard," he replied, and his tone implied blame and a sense of outrage.

"And I don't in the least regret it," she added quickly, "for, taking things altogether, I live a much freer and happier life than I did before. I have no cares, and my little home is delightful. I am in the happiest circumstances and ought to be thankful. I should be so very pleased if you would come and convince yourself that it is so. . . . You would always find me at home in the middle of the day. . . . Perhaps you will dine with me some time?"

"Oh!" he said, apparently agreeably surprised.

She gave a sigh of relief at having steered clear of the rocks of her autobiography. He made no further inquiries. But he seemed equally unwilling to give information about himself, either with regard to his present or his past circumstances.

"Life has its shady side," he said, "and when one finds one's self among the shadows, it's a question whether it's advisable to speak about it."

"But I am such an old friend!" cried Lilly. "You can confide in me. Fancy that we are sitting on the old terrace in the Junkerstrasse. . . . Don't you remember . . . that time we first spoke to each other? It was just such a May evening as this."

"It was warmer," he replied, turning up the collar of his jacket as far as his ears.

"You are cold?" she asked, laughing, for she was aglow from head to foot.

"I haven't"—he paused—"my summer overcoat with me to-night."

"Oh, then we had better get up," she said, becoming thoughtful; "we can talk just as well walking about."

And so they paced up and down in the shadow of the old church; but the interchange of personal confidences flagged. He evaded questions and she evaded them, and they put each other off with generalities. She extolled her happy lot; he sighed over his: "It's hard—very hard!" just as he had done at the time of his examination; she could hear him as plainly as if it were yesterday.

"How are your people?" she asked, to change the subject:

His father had died after a short illness two years ago, his mother still made cravats.

As he told her this, he settled the invisible tie under his upturned collar. No doubt he was wearing a gay token of maternal skill and maternal generosity.

Then, when she had expressed her condolences, she inquired with a slightly beating heart how Frau Asmussen was, and her daughters.

He made a sound with his lips as he answered: "They are very undesirable neighbours. The elder of the two girls has married a cashier, who is likely to lose his berth owing to irregularities. The younger has charge of the library, and the mother now drinks like a fish."

He related this in the same outraged tone in which he had previously alluded to Lilly's divorce.

"He is evidently still very proper," Lilly thought, with a sense of her own unworthiness and impropriety.

He was unhappy, nevertheless. She was sure of that.

And poor, very, very poor! Poorer than she had ever been in all her life. Who could say if he were not suffering the pangs of hunger now as he walked along beside her, shivering in his threadbare, shabby coat?

"Well, Herr Redlich," she said, "if your engagements will allow you, why not come to-morrow and dine with me?"

His engagements interfered most emphatically with his getting off in the middle of the day to change his clothes . . . but if she wouldn't mind his coming as he was . . .

"You may come just as you like," she cried with a laugh. "And you shall have your mother's potato soup."

So saying, she squeezed both his hands and jumped into a tramcar.

Oh, what a joy this was! What a joy! Now she had found what she had been looking for so long. Someone for whom she could care, someone to pet and spoil. Someone to whom she would be more than a toy and a plaything; who would regard her as his sunshine and bread of life, and his gentle guide to hope and happiness.

Someone who would be hers alone—hers alone!

He had risen from the grave of her youth, even as she had imagined in her dreams. And now life was going to be different; full of riches, full of secrets. Little, funny, but perfectly innocent secrets!

That night she slept little. Her new-found happiness kept her awake like children's Christmas anticipations. Her present servant, a buxom country girl, who had soon got accustomed to town ways, stared in astonishment the next morning when Lilly, whom she had hitherto regarded as lazy, rose early and prepared to go out marketing.

"I am expecting a friend," explained Lilly, smiling.

She wanted to buy everything herself—the meat, the radishes; above all, the sausages that once had been the glory of his mother's potato soup.

She also superintended the cooking. She laid the table, moved the palm from the aquarium so that there should be something green on the table, for in her excitement she had forgotten to buy flowers. This was her very first guest at dinner for more than two years; and such a dear guest, perhaps the dearest she could possibly have entertained.

At half-past twelve the servant came in, turning up her nose in contempt, to say that a young man wanted to speak to her mistress.

"That is my guest!" cried Lilly.

"I shouldn't have thought it," said the girl, with a haughty inflection in her voice, as Lilly rushed past her to welcome him.

At first he seemed too shy to enter the light. He hung about the doorpost and tugged at his suit, which indeed looked dreadfully shabby and frayed, more so than last night.

His inflamed eyes, like two red slits blinking behind his round glasses, gave him an air of groping helplessness. The lofty intellectual forehead had acquired an ugly receding look, because the forelock of genius no longer fell over it. His once magnificent mass of fair hair had become a matted thatch of tow, and looked as if a comb hadn't touched it for many a long day.

He appeared disinclined for conversation. He devoured the potato soup with tremulous appreciation, leaving the slices of sausage to the last. When his soup-plate was dry, he stuck his fork into one bit after the other, and conveyed it to his mouth with uneasy glances to the right and left, as if he suspected someone were waiting in ambush to deprive him of his pleasure.

The roast meat filled him with less awe, and he heaped his plate high, regardless of the waiting-maid's sneers. More-

over, he drank Richard's good claret in long, unconscionable draughts, and with flushed, mottled cheeks began to laugh and find his tongue.

Lilly, who had been rather depressed at first, watched him thaw with relief, and thought perhaps, after all, he might be made presentable. And then the idea occurred to her that here really was a case of working out a man's salvation, very different from her delusions about saving a Walter von Prell. And this reflection filled her with renewed blissful assurance.

After the meal, they retired to the corner drawing-room. And here, under the influence of the unaccustomed wine, he became a prey to frivolity, seated himself in the rocking-chair, and tickled the snarling monkey.

He presented a ghastly spectacle as he lounged back in the chair with his legs nonchalantly stretched out before him. The frayed ends of his trousers were tucked into the tops of his boots, exposing to view ragged loops; and as Lilly contemplated him, she said to herself, "This must be altered," and she began to cudgel her brains as to how a transformation was to be achieved.

As for him, the barriers of reserve being once broken down he began to disclose his innermost soul and to air his views on life.

Oh! what feelings of gall and bitterness came to light! He had been so soured by the long struggle with privations and hardships, and eternal envy of others happier and brighter and more favoured by fortune than himself, that he could see no merit in anything, and attacked all talents, attainments, and prosperity—called everyone humbugs and hypocrites, said that getting on was entirely a matter of birth, interest, and push, and anathematised success as a hollow fraud.

At the same time he had very little to say about his own personal experiences. She could not find out whether he was still a student; he would only confess that his deepest feelings had been hurt irreparably in the grim fight for existence. And while he talked and laughed stridently, two semi-circular dents appeared in his lean cheeks, giving his face a hard, sarcastic expression. Lilly had a dim remembrance that of old these marks had been visible on his youthful countenance, though less accentuated.

"Oh, poor, poor fellow!" she thought compassionately, and resolved on the instant to make a man of him again, inwardly

and outwardly. But when he was gone she felt very sad and depressed. "Am I much better off?" she asked herself. "What has become of the joyous confidence in life that I once had? Where is my joy of life, where my Song of Songs?"

That afternoon, before Richard came, she evolved a scheme by which she could bestow a new wardrobe on Fritz Redlich, without drawing on Richard's purse or offending Fritz Redlich.

"What do you think?" she said to him after tea. "Since yesterday two rather extraordinary things have happened—one a very nice thing, and the other a very sad thing. First, I have met an old friend of mine, who before he went to the university lived on the same floor as I did. And then this morning a poor student called and begged for something to eat. He looked so miserable! Have you, in case he calls again, any clothes to give away? Suits and boots—he wants everything."

"I'll give you some with pleasure," said Richard. "I don't know what to do with all my left-off stuff." But the other, the "old friend," made him thoughtful. "What sort of a chap is he?" he asked.

In her effort to keep distinct the two mythical beings that she had made out of one living reality, she began to sing the old friend's praises with far too much exaggeration to be judicious. He was an extremely clever and quite distinguished young professor, who had completed his university course and was just entering on a brilliant career, a paragon of knowledge and intellect, and goodness knew what else.

"What was his special subject?"

She really didn't know, only that it was something very profound and erudite. Nothing but an academic career was worthy of his talents.

She found herself immersed in such a whirlpool of lies that at last she did not know what she was saying.

Richard, acutely conscious of his intellectual limitations, cherished an unbounded reverence for anyone with brains; he grew very red, looked uneasy and vexed.

"I suppose he'll be coming to see you?" he asked.

"Of course," she replied, highly satisfied with her finesse.

"Congratulations on your soul's affinity," he said with a mocking bow, "so long as I am not expected to meet him."

Nothing could have turned out better. The next morning a factory porter brought her a huge bundle from Herr Dehnicke. It contained a nearly new summer tweed suit in the latest fashion, several coloured cambric shirts, a pair of boots, and blue silky-looking undergarments.

He seemed to have wanted to exhibit his charity in a very magnificent manner; for, as a rule, generosity to the poor was not in his line.

The next thing to be thought of was how to hand the clothes over to Fritz Redlich without giving offence.

Three days later, when he came again, she made an excuse after dinner for showing him over the flat. He must see how well it was arranged. When they came to the lumber-room she opened the door quite casually, and there, in the company of discarded blouses, broken vases, faded flowers, and other rubbish, the tweed suit hung ostentatiously.

"When I left the general's house I brought it and some other men's clothes here by mistake," she explained. "That's why it hangs there getting spoilt."

His small, weak eyes lighted greedily.

Did he perhaps know of someone to whom such things would be useful?

He answered snappily that he did not, but he could not resist casting a downward glance at his own trousers.

Wasn't there anyone to whom he would be doing a favour by offering the clothes?

There was no one that he knew of, he repeated.

In spite of her anxiety not to hurt his feelings, she plucked up courage and remarked that there was, if she were not mistaken, an extraordinary similarity between his figure and the quondam wearer's of the suit. The general might have been a trifle stouter, but any little tailor would alter . . .

Then he became seriously angry. He was not the man to accept benefits from any charitably disposed person he met. Did she think he had sunk so low as that? He had principles, and to wear cast-off raiment belonging to people he knew nothing about was a proceeding his principles would never tolerate.

Lilly, with a sigh, reluctantly relinquished her idea.

He seemed unable to tear himself away. He sat on and on—and at last she was obliged to give him a hint, for at any moment now Richard might be coming in.

At the top of the stairs he turned round again, and asked, stuttering, would it be as convenient if next time he came in the evening ?

" Can you no longer manage to get off at midday ? " she asked, taken aback. On Richard's account she never received strangers late in the afternoon.

" It wasn't that," he began to explain, lingering and hesitating, so that she listened in a fever for footsteps on the stairs.

" Well, what then ? "

" I should like to think over the matter you mentioned just now, and . . . and . . . "

" Well, and what ? "

" And perhaps when it's dark I might . . . carry the parcel away with me." And he rushed down the steps.

" So he had to swallow his pride, poor fellow ! " she thought, as she looked after him full of pity.

The same evening she made a parcel of the things and sent them to him by post, with a sovereign and a thousand apologies. She wanted him to have a new hat, she said, and no trouble with regard to alterations.

A few days later, when he put in an appearance again at dinner, one would hardly have known him, he looked so smart and brushed-up. The suit fitted as if made for him, and though the dandy boots were too long, he had prevented them turning up at the toe by padding them with cotton wool. Even the scornful servant scanned him with a more friendly eye.

It was a pity he hadn't parted with his shock of hair and got his beard shaved off. You could almost have been seen in the street with him if he had. His cheeks had filled out wonderfully. His eyes, too, were better ; thanks to the doctor to whom she had sent him almost by force. Gradually, too, his manners became less rough. He gave up bolting his food and putting his fingers into his mouth, and he acquired the art of drinking claret without flushing. And not only in externals, but mentally he began to reflect some of the tranquil well-being of his hospitable surroundings. His abuse became more discriminating, and he could even forgive people the unpardonable crime of being happy.

He displayed charming tact in refraining from inquiries as to Lilly's position. And she knew how to thank him for



it. Though she avoided cross-examining him about his own affairs, she was able to piece together a picture of his scholastic failure from the remarks and self-upbraidings that he let fall.

After two years of distressing poverty he had abandoned the teaching profession and his cherished convictions to take up theology for the sake of a stipend offered to him in his native town.

"Only think of that!" Lilly said to herself, deeply moved. She recalled the sunny early morning when the sound of the church bells had greeted them from the green valley.

Even this supreme act of renunciation seemed to have brought him no lasting blessing, for he had been obliged for more than a year to earn his bread by addressing envelopes and doing other mysterious odd jobs, about which he was not communicative.

"All the same," he said, "I have kept up my dignity in spite of everything. And however poor and despised I am, I have not lost my self-respect. No, I have not lost it."

As he said this he paced up and down the room gloomily, with fire flashing from his small eyes. And when he expanded his chest and threw back his shoulders and ran his fingers through his tousled mane, he resembled once more the youthful hero who had once fired Lilly's enthusiasm and filled her imagination with ambitious dreams.

In order to complete her good work and restore to him his lost happiness she insisted on knowing what ideal he had at heart, what path in life he would choose.

What he wanted, he said, was to leave Berlin. He would like again to feel a free man who had his apportioned duty and knew how to do it, and to breathe fresher, purer air.

"Ah! all of us would like something of the kind," thought Lilly, with a sigh.

A post as private tutor would satisfy him, somewhere in the country. He would prefer a parsonage, for then a library would be at his disposal.

"And where the lime-trees will flower," thought Lilly, "the corn wave in the breeze, and the cattle will be called to drink."

She almost wept with envy at the thought.

From this day forward she left no stone unturned to gratify the heart's desire of the old friend of her youth. She gave him money to advertise in the most likely papers, wrote with

her own hand testimonials and letters of introduction, and asked the comrades of her "set" to interest themselves in him.

She had to go about it all very secretly, for fear Richard should suspect what she was doing. For even as it was, she had to put up with a good deal at this time. He complained that she did not show him sufficient consideration, that she was cold and unloving, and that he could detect a hostile influence in everything she said.

"I suppose your talented friend thinks so. You had better ask the learned genius."

These little sarcastic speeches were reiterated *ad nauseam*. And one day the bomb burst. In defiance of his promise that when she had visitors he would always be announced, he suddenly burst in on Lilly and the friend of her youth while they were dining together. He had not rung, had hardly knocked, and his face was as black as thunder. Growing pale, she sprang to her feet, and Fritz Redlich, as if caught in a guilty act, followed her example. He looked sheepish, and the end of his napkin dropped into the soup.

For a moment silence reigned, only broken by a malicious giggle from the servant standing in the doorway.

"I ask your pardon, dear madam," said Richard, keeping up his threatening air and demeanour. "I was only anxious to know how you were."

"Herr Richard Dehnicke, a kind acquaintance; Herr Redlich, my old friend," she introduced them.

Then he looked at his much-dreaded rival more closely. In surprise and disapproval he regarded his unkempt hair and beard, but as his glance sank lower his face cleared, and a baffled though distinctly pleased ray of recognition illumined his features. Was not that *his* suit and *his* shirt?

Still further did his glance descend, past the napkin lying in the soup-plate, down to the trousers. And were not those *his* trousers and those *his* cast-off boots, which the brilliant young genius was wearing on his feet?

"Oh!" he said expressively, and nothing more. Then, with a sinister curl of the lip, he turned to Lilly. "Can I speak a few words to madame alone?" he asked.

"If Herr Redlich will excuse me," she said, and in her confusion and from old habit, she opened the door of the bedroom, as if that were quite the correct place in

which to speak a few words with an ordinary "kind" acquaintance.

Richard, equally accustomed to this way, followed her, heedless of the intimacy he exposed by so doing.

"Look here," he said, when he had shut the door, "I've been fool enough to be jealous of your so-called soul's affinity. But after what I've seen just now, I swear you may entertain your friends as much as you like—morning, noon, and night for all I care. And I'll keep a stock of old suits on hand for them. Now, go back to your dinner, you little donkey!"

Then he went out by the other door. She heard him laughing to himself after he had gone.

She was so deeply ashamed that she scarcely knew how to return to the friend of her youth, he who was so strict in his morals that at the bare mention of her divorce he had displayed pained disgust.

Then it dawned on her that she was standing in her bedroom. Now everything had been shown up—everything! However little acquainted he might be with the ways of the world, he could not help perceiving her relations with the intruder who had so suddenly appeared in her flat and disappeared with equal suddenness.

For a long time she hesitated what to do, with her hand on the handle of the door. She listened in fear for his departing step, the angry rasping of his throat—even his silence filled her with alarm. Then, trembling and ready to confess everything in tears of penitence, she ventured back to the dining-room.

What did she see? Only the gentleman still seated at the table, rubbing out the stains made by the wet napkin on his waistcoat. The blue goggles lay beside his plate, and he blinked at her with friendly and unconcerned eyes.

"Is he gone already?" he asked ingenuously. Evidently he had not even heard the door slam.

When the hot joint came in he set to work with undiminished appetite, and made no further reference to the interlude. In truth, it seemed that his mind was so pure that he could not see impurity when it was almost thrust upon his vision.

She was very grateful to him, and, to show her gratitude, she determined to let him come in the evening if he liked, as Richard had said he might come at any time. He should come without invitation, she said, and if she chanced to be

out, the servant would get him supper, and see that he had all he wanted. Then, recollecting the grimaces she had made on his first appearance, she instructed her to be specially attentive to the guest, and to make him feel perfectly at home.

The buxom country girl drew down the corners of her mouth and said nothing.

After these events, Lilly redoubled her efforts on behalf of Fritz Redlich. And once more Frau Julia proved a helpful friend.

"Leave it to me," she said one day. "I used to know up there"—she hesitated a little—"someone who has great influence and is considered a God Almighty in more than one parsonage. I might write to him, but, of course, my name mustn't be mentioned. It still acts there like a red rag to a bull."

The next day Lilly sent her an advertisement that Fritz Redlich had inserted in one of the papers. She was to forward it to the influential magnate. The answer would be direct, and the intervention of a third person not required. She, too, was of opinion that it would be better if he believed that he owed his future employment to his own unaided exertions.

As luck would have it, Frau Julia's plan succeeded. One evening in the following week he called at Lilly's unexpectedly—a frequent event now, whether she was at home or not—and told her with evident satisfaction that his advertisement had brought forth immediate results. He had been asked to send his testimonials at once to a clergyman in Further Pomerania, and to hold himself in readiness to leave Berlin. The clergyman seemed quite eager about engaging him.

Lilly's heart swelled with joyous pride. She wouldn't have betrayed on any account that she had had a finger in the pie. Nevertheless, she flattered herself that it was all her doing. She had made him, and she felt he belonged to her more than anyone else in the world.

The meal progressed in calm and beatific silence. As he had not let her know that he was coming, the first course did not consist of potato soup.

She apologised for the omission, and added, with a little

pang at her heart, "I suppose we shall not have many more meals together?"

"Probably not," he said; and cast a glance at the servant, whose presence obviously embarrassed him. Otherwise she felt sure that he would have expressed his feelings more graciously.

Afterwards they withdrew to the corner drawing-room. The hot July air came in through the open windows, but the little naked monkey, whose cage was placed near the aquarium, was perished with cold, and now shivered so violently that he had to be wrapped up in his coat, an attention to which he submitted with snarls. The bullfinch piped its evening song and it grew dusk.

Fritz Redlich sat as usual in the rocking-chair, his favourite seat after he had partaken of a good meal. She walked excitedly up and down the room.

"I shall soon be lonely again," she thought, "and start knocking about all alone, as before."

Yet what a piece of luck it was for him! What a piece of luck! She told him so repeatedly.

"Yes," he said, "it certainly is very fortunate that I have fought my way as I have done"; he emphasised the last few words and went on, "When I think what awful years those have been, how often I have been compelled to belie my character, how often my principles have been endangered . . . And not only that," he added after a depressed pause, "there have been the many doubtful circumstances in which I have been thrown, and the enforced connection with impurity, not to be wondered at when one takes into consideration how easily a man becomes infected by the society he is in, and finds himself doing things that he would rather leave alone. It's hard—very hard, Frau Czepanek."

"Oh, please don't Frau Czepanek me!" she exclaimed. "Can't you call me 'Frau Lilly,' or simply 'Lilly'? We are old friends, you know."

"Willingly, if you wish," he replied.

To-day she felt a tenderness for him such as she had not experienced since the days of her early youth. It was, too, a motherly, a sisterly tenderness, and something else besides—something like a shimmer of light drawing nearer and nearer from the distance.

"Tell me, Herr Fritz," she demanded, pausing in front of

him, "tell me honestly, have you ever loved in all your life?"

He jumped as if he had been struck.

"Loved? What do you mean?"

"Well, what should I mean?" she laughed, drumming with her fingers on the back of the rocking-chair. "What should I mean?"

He seemed to breathe more freely. "For love, properly speaking, I have neither the time nor the inclination," he said.

"And no woman has ever loved you?"

"Do I look," he asked, shrugging his shoulders, "as if anyone could love me?"

His utter despondency irritated her. But she turned it off with a playful "Now, now!" and shook her finger at him.

Again he looked alarmed, as if the mere suggestion of such a possibility filled him with anxiety.

The poor fellow! Never had a girl's eyes glowingly sought his; never had a woman's arms encircled his neck in rapture. The highest pleasure—the only thing that both for man and woman makes life worth living—he had been denied.

A confession burned on her lips, a confession dating from far-off, half-forgotten times, which would have told him how mistaken he was. But she choked it back. Not to-day; perhaps later, when it came to saying farewell.

It grew dark, and the light reflected from the street-lamps played on wall and ceiling. The monkey had curled himself up in a ball under his coat, and the little bullfinch had gone to roost.

Lilly still continued her pacing up and down, lightly brushing his elbow each time she passed the rocking-chair.

At last she paused again in front of him. There he sat, he whom she had once adored so passionately, and he was quite ignorant of it. Quite ignorant of all the miracles woman's love can work. The poor, poor unfortunate creature!

"You really ought to get your hair cut," she said with a nervous laugh, "and then perhaps you'll have a better chance with the women."

Slowly she lifted her left hand, which felt as if a weight was hanging to it, and laid it on his rough wavy hair. It rebounded from her gentle touch like an air-cushion.

He started, stopped rocking himself in the chair, looked round uneasily, and gave a cough.

"Yes, yes," he said after a silence, "that's sensible advice. If I want to make a favourable impression when I enter on my new vocation, I ought——"

Just then he turned his head sharply towards the window, and her hand glided down of its own accord on to his neck. She choked back a sigh, and he stood up and hurriedly took his leave. She was so embarrassed that she did not press him to stay longer.

The servant was standing outside in the passage, with the lamp in her hand to light him downstairs.

"The day after to-morrow I shall expect you," Lilly called after him from the window.

He sent up a "Thank you and good-night" in reply, and disappeared in the darkness. The poor, poor boy! Plunged in bitterness and depression he went his way, little dreaming what paradises might have been his for the asking.

For the remainder of the evening she was distraught and anxious. "It would have been better not to have put my hand on his head," she thought. Yet, all the same, she was glad that she had.

The next afternoon a postcard came from Frau Julia. She had good news from "high quarters." The negotiations were concluded. Her *protégé* was to start without delay, and even his travelling expenses had been provided. Lilly cried with joy.

Thus was her good work completed. The friend of her youth was saved, and his zest for life restored. Now it only remained to teach him how to laugh and enter into his inheritance of proud courageous freedom, all that belonged to him by rights, which she herself could now never hope to attain.

Fate might do with her as it pleased, so long as he made upward progress. He had become an essential part of her existence. She had made him her own by her efforts and prayers, her lies, and her toil, and when he came to-morrow evening, as arranged, she would tell him all—all about that first love . . . and everything.

And once more—in farewell—she would lay her hand on his shock of hair, and then let come what might.

The next evening she dressed herself more carefully than

had been her wont when she spent the evening with him. She made the potato soup with her own hands and cut the beef-steak—he ate much smaller portions than he used to—so that the servant had nothing to do but put it in the pan.

The clock struck eight, but he had not come. He was busy packing, she thought, to console herself. It struck nine, and still he had not come; then it struck ten, and there was no further hope, unless the door was locked up and he was clapping his hands to be let in, as Richard did sometimes. She leaned out at the open window till it struck eleven. Then, tired out and very sad, she went to bed.

The next morning she received the following letter :

“ HONOURED AND GRACIOUS MADAME,

“ Having succeeded by my own unaided efforts in procuring a decent position, I consider it my duty to break off all connection with my former life. As I think I have told you more than once, I was often forced by circumstances into situations repugnant to my high principles, and that, in spite of my resolute character, I was led into temptations which, I frankly confess, I have not invariably emerged from unscathed.

“ I am perfectly aware that I am under obligations to you, dear madame, and I herewith tender you my heartfelt thanks, for it shall never be said of me that I am wanting in gratitude. I have kept an account of the cash which circumstances have from time to time compelled me to borrow from you, and, as soon as my salary permits, I shall refund every farthing, and also send back the suit, which I am wearing at present. I may say here, that if you had really respected me you would never have subjected me to the humiliating encounter with the gentleman to whom these articles of clothing once obviously belonged.

“ In conclusion, I hope I may be allowed to give you the following exhortation. Mend your ways, dear madame, and change your mode of life, which is an outrage on all the laws of morality. I believe that in giving utterance to this sentiment I am acting the part of a friend more than if I were to leave you under the delusion that I am a simpleton.

“ Yours always gratefully,

“ FRITZ REDLICH,

Cand. Phil et Theol.”



Lilly felt this experience deeply, and suffered for a long time acute anguish.

Not till several months had elapsed was the humorous side of the incident brought to her notice by the servant coming to give her warning. The visits of the student of philosophy and of strict morals on the evenings when Lilly was absent had not been, it appeared, without their consequences.

## CHAPTER XII

**I**N the early autumn of the same year, Richard took a husband's holiday, and went to Ostend, while Lilly lived cheaply and innocently at a bathing-place on the Baltic, where she passed as a widow of good birth and position. She accepted the admiring homage of several spinsters, allowed a young missionary to dedicate a volume of verse to her, and declined an honourable offer from a widower, town-clerk of Pirna, with expressions of esteem and friendship.

Lilly enjoyed those six weeks immensely. The winter that followed differed very little from those that had preceded it. At Christmas, Richard's present to her was a hired carriage with the seven-pointed coronet emblazoned on its panels. He wanted to avoid the unpleasantness of his mother—whose prejudice against Lilly increased from year to year—ordering the family brougham for her own use when he was driving about in it with his mistress. Another present was a sable coat of the newest shape with dozens of tails, that cost a small fortune.

In spite of Richard's reproaches, Lilly made very little use of either of her new acquisitions, for the never-silenced inner voice of fear said to her that this sort of pomp and luxury would make her more and more part of the world she longed to flee from. While Richard aimed with stubborn pertinacity at draining the cup of pleasure to the dregs, Lilly hankered more and more after respectability. It was her last anchor of hope in the barren life which, as the days dragged along, left her tortured and dissatisfied in the midst of music, laughter, and light.

The only person in her set who stimulated her intellect in the least was Frau Julia. She knew how to relate entertaining

stories, she showed that she had been at home in different worlds, and that her mind retained the impressions she had received there. But for some time past her silly little curly head had been enveloped in a web of impenetrable mystery. The erotic verse, which she had contributed to modern German periodicals, no longer appeared, and her morbid short stories were nowhere to be met with. When her friends teased her and asked what had become of her art, she would smile like a coy bride, and answer, "Wait and see."

At this time Lilly would gladly have seen more of Frau Julia, for she had long since given up feeling that she was in any way superior to her or more moral. But she did not find it easy to approach her, so she carried the burden of her hopes and fears unshared, and trudged on alone, thirsting by the way.

What now came to pass happened on the nineteenth of March, a date never to be forgotten, because it was St. Joseph's Day. It was a day of soft spring-like breezes and pinkish-grey skies; a day on which Nature's orchestra seemed to be rehearsing for the great symphony of spring.

The grassy slopes of the canal-banks were already beginning to turn green, the wild-ducks, in couples, swam on the smooth surface of the water, and big foam-edged blocks of melting ice floated downstream.

Lilly, filled with vague and wistful longings, could not stand it any longer indoors, and prepared to go out early. She wanted to run, cry, shout, jump hedges, throw herself on the grass—anything, she didn't care what, so long as she escaped for a few hours from this prison, which smelt of powder and perfumed paints, and was oppressed by the weight of indolence.

She got ready for a walk and gave a few directions to Adele, the new servant, who was an elderly and rather patronising woman, thoroughly accustomed to service in the households of single ladies. Instead of waiting for her carriage, she took the tramway out to Grunewald. She alighted at the boundary where smart villadom ends, and the maltreated woods rise high above the yoke of the builder, and walked on straight ahead, not knowing where she was going.

A few motor-cars rushed by, and young men in them smiled and beckoned to her. They might have been actual

acquaintances or only making fun of her ; but, anyhow she thought it wiser to turn off the main-road, so she struck into the sandy path that ran along the lake to the old Jagdschloss. Here far and wide she saw not a human soul.

The chilly March wind swept over the milky-blue water and agitated the reeds and rushes. Ice was still to be seen round the edge of the lake, but it was so thin and pierced with holes that every small ripple that broke on the shore sent up jets of spray. From the pine-branches there sounded now and then the song of a bird, sad enough to extinguish awakened expectations of spring.

"It looks more like spring in the town than here," thought Lilly. But the keenness of the wind, full of the pungent scent of moss and pine-needles, did her good. As she strode along, she met it full in the face. Her cheeks glowed ; she felt her frozen blood thaw and send fresh life pulsating through her languid limbs.

Suddenly she burst out laughing. Everything was all nonsense. Her pining discontent, her longing, Richard's snobbish ambition, his mother's everlasting marriage schemes—even respectability was humbug.

What had she to do with it all ? She—the free, the wild, the ruined Lilly ? There must be something better in store for her, something nobler. Not in Dr. Salmoni's sense—God forbid !—but something hardening, pure, and life-giving, like this March wind sweeping through her veins.

She heard a sound from the top of a pine-tree with which she had become familiar in the park at Lischnitz. It was a kind of whistle, half-defiant, half-enticing, which ended in a sharp "Tschek-tschek." She stopped, looked up, and whistled too. It was a couple of squirrels that had been chasing each other in corkscrew circles round the trunk, and now stood suddenly still in alarm at the sight of her.

"Tschek-tschek !" she cried, to incite the little red-coats to a new game, but, not succeeding, she stooped and picked up a pebble.

Just as she was in the act of throwing it, she caught sight of a pair of eyes fixed on her from behind another trunk—large, questioning, astonished eyes, that narrowed and darkened as they gazed, as if they wanted to look away, but couldn't—a pair of eyes that surely she had known long, long ago.

But no ! she had never seen them before ; for the young man

who had watched with her the squirrels' game and stood with his hat in his hand, still half hidden behind a tree, was quite a stranger to her. If she had ever met him, she would never have forgotten it. It would not be easy to forget that serious, self-contained, Greek young face, with the sensitive, slender-bridged nose and the lustrous eyes of the dreamer.

He was not very fashionably clad, and she liked him for it. He had on a brown overcoat of a not very modern cut, and underneath a suit of rough tweed, quite un-German and still less English.

He seemed gradually to come to life. He put on his hat and emerged from behind the tree-trunk. "Now he is going to speak to me," she thought, and she felt a sickening dread. But no! He lifted his hat, threw her one more long, questioning, earnest look—almost a look of recognition—walked past her, and took the path she had come by.

Lilly, too, would have liked to walk on, but she could not make up her mind, and, not to be caught staring after him, she slipped behind the same trunk which had lately concealed him from view.

She wondered if he would look back. No, he did not do that, and she felt somehow hurt and neglected.

Smaller and smaller grew the tall figure. He strode over the sand with a somewhat heavy step. "He's never been a soldier," she thought. Then she fancied that he stooped and afterwards turned round. Yes, he was making quite a wide and careful survey of the landscape, as if bent on discovering her. But she was safely hidden behind her tree and did not stir.

Then he walked on again and vanished in a bend in the path.

"A pity I haven't got the carriage," she said to herself.

If she had been driving she could have overtaken him without appearing to follow him, and the seven-pointed coronet would have duly impressed him. As it was, he must have formed a bad opinion of her for wandering about alone, whistling like a boy and throwing stones at amorous squirrels. Nevertheless, as she made her way homewards she felt as if some rare and beautiful gift had been bestowed upon her.

Was it possible that she had seen him before? She recalled the young man she had met in the Pragerstrasse, when she was with her husband in Dresden; how he had given her the same sort of look with a flash in it of sad recognition; and how

she had wanted to turn round and ask, "Who are you? Do you belong to me? Would you like me to belong to you?" And she had forborne to follow her instinct, because to turn round in the street would have been a crime in the colonel's eyes.

To-day she was free—so free that she could choose her friends as her heart dictated—and yet she had not followed him, but had let him go, he who, whether he was that same young man or not, might perchance belong to her or she to him.

With half-closed eyes she filled in the details of the picture that she had formed of him. His beard was small, dark, and double-pointed, and so closely shaven on the cheeks that it appeared only a blue shadow. Such beards were rarely seen in Berlin, though Italians and Frenchmen wore them. His lips were full, hard, and firmly closed, as if chiselled out of marble; his high, square forehead seemed to give him an aspect of wrath, but not the vulgar wrath of an ordinary mortal towards a poor creature like herself; it was like the wrath of the gods—divine.

So she continued to rhapsodise, forgot where she was going and lost her way, to find herself finally on quite the wrong road. Anything might have happened to her in the woods, where unprotected ladies were not safe at any hour of the day from the attacks of tramps. But she scarcely gave a thought to the risks she had run, got into the first tram she came to, and reached home, exhausted but glowing all over, two hours later than she intended.

She could not eat anything, but threw herself on the *chaise longue* and dreamed.

The bell sounded, and a man's voice was heard at the door. It couldn't be Richard. He never came before half-past four.

Then Adele came in, and said that there was a strange gentleman outside who wished to know if madame had missed her card-case; he had picked one up in the woods.

Lilly sprang up. The little brocaded case, which she had carried in her hand with her silver chain-purse, was not there; she must have dropped it and not noticed that it was missing in her excitement.

"What is the gentleman like?" she asked.

He was tall, young, and handsome, indeed, remarkably handsome, was the information she received from Adele.

"Has he a dark, close-cut beard?"

Yes, he had.

The delightful shock of the surprise made her stagger.

"Ask him to come in," she stammered, with no thought of how she looked, though her hands went up to her hair.

As he entered the room she could scarcely recognise him, there was such a thick red mist before her eyes.

"I beg your pardon, gracious Frau," she heard him say in the clear calm tones of a man who has no ignoble dealings.

"I should not have disturbed you if your address had been on your card as well as your name. I looked you up in the directory, but being uncertain that there were not others of your name . . . I . . ."

"You are very kind indeed to have taken so much trouble," she replied, and asked him to sit down.

"I am Dr. Rennschmidt," he said, waiting till she had settled herself in a corner of the sofa before accepting her invitation. He drew the card-case from his pocket and laid it on the table.

She smiled her thanks for his courtesy, and then, as it seemed necessary to her to exaggerate the service he had done her, she told him that she specially valued the little card-case as it was a souvenir of her husband, and she would have been very grieved to lose it.

His face grew a shade graver. There was a pause, in which his eyes rested on her features with a steadfast, questioning, almost searching expression. There was nothing in it of the tentative brazen advances that she knew so well in other masculine eyes. His glance was one of pure, disinterested admiration tinged with reverence.

"Did we not meet a short time ago on the outskirts of the wood?" she asked warily.

He replied eagerly in the affirmative. "If I had not been so awkward I should have asked your pardon then for playing the eavesdropper. I saw how startled you were . . . but at the moment I could think of nothing to do but to make myself scarce. It seemed the kindest course to take from your point of view."

His manner of speaking was so joyously frank, it was like a tonic to her, yet withal made her feel slightly ashamed.

"And now you have done something kinder still," she answered, with as much hearty appreciation as if he had saved her life.

"Oh, please don't mention it," he said. "I ought to have turned back at once. But it seemed as if the earth had swallowed you up. I was quite anxious about you."

She smiled to herself in happy trepidation. A little more and she would have confided to him where she had hidden herself.

"What must you have thought of me," she said, "wandering about in the woods by myself?"

"I thought that you did not feel lonely in the society of Nature, otherwise you would have brought a companion."

"You were right," she responded eagerly. "I left my carriage at the Restaurant Hundekohl"—the carriage had to be dragged into the conversation after all—"but it drove back, through some misunderstanding, and I was venturesome. You love Nature very much too?"

"I don't know about 'very much,'" he answered. "I may say in Cordelia's words: 'I love it according to my bond, not more nor less.' Don't you find that love of Nature is neither a merit nor an eccentricity, but simply a vital function?"

"Yes, of course," Lilly faltered, thinking to herself, "How exceedingly clever he is! Will you ever be able to keep pace with him?"

"But to be quite sincere," he went on, "I cannot get used to Nature in these climes. Her poverty oppresses me. I am in the position with regard to her of having outgrown the home of my fathers, for which I heap reproaches on myself. I try hard to get back on the old terms with her, and praise her whenever I honestly can. But first more recent pictures must fade from my mind. You see, I have only just come back from Italy, where I have been living for the last two years."

With a deep sigh she gazed at him, considering him now positively unearthly.

"Two whole years!" she cried.

"I am engaged on a great scientific work," he continued; "for its sake—no, it would be more correct to say for my health's sake—I was sent to Italy. My uncle, who is a father to me, wished it. . . . And it was Italy that first inspired me with the idea of the work, and afterwards fatherland and my old life and studies, everything else, went to the wall."

As he spoke his eyes flashed with enthusiasm. He seemed palpitating with his great purpose; and the old former



yearning for Italian skies awoke and beat its wings within her heart.

"Yes, isn't it true," she cried, infected by his ardour, "that there is the home of all great ideas? There you may feel your utmost. What you have sown there will repay and bear fruit. Isn't it so? I have never been there, but I am quite sure that is how people feel. There, where everything great and beautiful belongs to the soil; there, one's self becomes greater and nobler. . . . One has no more petty sordid cares. Isn't it true?"

He had listened to her astounded, his eyes beaming and radiant. "Yes," he said almost solemnly, "it is exactly as you say."

She felt a sensation of joy. Wasn't this harmony of thought a confirmation of the affinity that she had from the first moment that she had set eyes on him sought and hoped for? Nothing could ever separate her from him after this. Perhaps he really was the physical embodiment of that shadow belonging to the Dresden days that had taken up its abode in her soul!

"I can't help feeling as if we had met before," she murmured softly, with eyes downcast.

"I feel like that too," he answered, "but it can't be so, for if we had met I could never have forgotten the time and place."

"You were not in Dresden, by any chance, about this time six years ago?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Six years ago I was studying in Bonn. The term was over, it is true, but I went for my vacation to my uncle's. He had just had his place restored."

"Where is it?"

"Near Coblenz."

"Then it couldn't have been. It's strange that we should both feel as if . . . " she said.

"There are certain pictures belonging to our psychic existence," he replied, "which seem like memories, and are in reality presentiments."

"I wonder what you mean?"

"I mean that one walks between past and coming experiences as on a tight-rope; that one reels and falls into space so soon as——"

"What?"

"So soon as one——" he broke off abruptly. "Pardon my asking, but are you an artist?"

"Why?" she asked nervously. She felt repelled. Was he making a fool of her?

"I gathered that you were from the plate outside your door."

The plate: "Pressed Flower Studio."

This was being rudely awakened from a pleasant dream to the stern facts of reality. But she must not lose her presence of mind and forfeit his esteem, so she answered carelessly:

"In a way. But mine is a very modest art. Once I worked hard at it, and it made me very happy. I learnt it soon after I became a widow." Her lips refused to utter the phrase, "soon after I was divorced." "I took it up more as a little distraction than as a serious means of earning a living. But then I had trouble with my eyes, and was obliged to give it up."

Three lies in one breath! But why not? She and everything round her was one big lie . . . all her gestures and all her thoughts. Only the cry that went up from her soul now, moving her to the depths of her being, was *not* a lie: "You shall be mine. I will be yours" And so for his sake she went on lying.

"It's painful to me to talk about it," she continued, with her handkerchief pressed against her eyes. "I still feel it so much. I hope you will be so kind as never again to refer to it."

"Never again" had slipped from her. It sounded as if she took for granted that their acquaintance was to continue, and, overwhelmed with shame and confusion, she rose and turned her face aside.

"Forgive me," he said, greatly concerned. "I had no idea . . ." He stood up to go.

A voice within her cried, "Stay, stay, stay!" But she was incapable of speaking, and felt as if turned to stone. Had he seen through her lies, divined who and what she was, and didn't wish to stay? She was conscious that her manner grew cold and haughty.

She extended her finger-tips to him. "It was kind of you to come," she said.

This was the moment to invite him to come again, but the words froze on her lips.

His face had grown very pale, and he looked at her with great, inquiring, expectant eyes.

"I hope we shall meet again," he said.

"I hope so, too," she replied frigidly.

He brushed her hand with his lips and was gone.

The end—the end! And all her fault. Happiness had looked in upon her, had lightly laid its hand in blessing on her brow, and then flown away, leaving nothing but this pain, a pain more intolerable than any she had ever known. It clutched at her throat and tore her heart like a physical pain.

During the night that followed she concocted a thousand plans by which she could contrive to find him out and meet him. As a scholar, he would probably be a constant visitor to the library. She would go there to read and study, in the hopes of coming across him. But, simpler still, why shouldn't she write to him?

"I don't love you," she would write. "Why should I love you when I hardly know you? But I feel that I am destined to have some influence in your life, and so . . ."

Finally she rejected all her plans, disgusted with her own lack of dignity. No; Lilly Czepanek would not throw herself thus at any man's head.

She became tormented once more with restlessness.

In the daytime she haunted the Leipziger and Potsdamer Strassen, and other parts where metropolitan life is at its busiest. Of an evening, instead of roaming about in distant suburbs as of yore, she kept close to the neighbourhood of her own dwelling, walking up and down incessantly on the solitary banks of the canal with quick, businesslike strides.

In spite of the economy on which she plumed herself, she left the light burning in the corner drawing-room, when she went out, for no apparent object.

It was on the fourth evening after their meeting that while she was pacing the further bank of the canal at about eight o'clock, when the stars hung like lamps in the sky, she happened to see among the trees the figure of a young man, who stood gazing up fixedly in the direction of her flat.

She could see nothing of his face, for his back was turned towards her, and it was dark just at that spot. With a slightly accelerated heart-beat she went on her way, but in a few moments her feet declined to take her further, and she was

obliged to retrace her steps. The dark figure still stood motionless among the trees, and regarded, through the bare branches, the light in her corner drawing-room. This time he heard her footstep and turned towards her.

Startled, she recognised his features. He too showed signs of being perturbed, for at first he made a foolish little attempt to look as if he had not seen her, then with an embarrassed smile he took off his hat.

She trembled so violently that she dared not give him her hand. "Dr.—Rennschmidt," was all she managed to ejaculate.

He was the first to regain his composure

"You will wonder," he began, walking beside her, "why I was standing here in the dark looking over there. . . . If I said it was by accident, you would scarcely credit it ; so I may as well confess at once. . . . I have been troubled, since we parted the other evening, with the thought that things were not quite all right between us ; there was a misunderstanding somewhere, a hitch, a hastiness—I don't exactly know what—but I feel that I owe you an apology for something."

"Why, if that was on your mind," she replied, "did not you come in and tell me ?"

"Would it have been permitted ?" he asked.

"Why not ?"

"Pardon, but I have always believed that what privileges and rights we men enjoy with regard to women are accorded to us by them. For us there exist no others. We may stand here, of course, in the dark and tear our hair . . . ."

"Have you been doing that ?"

"Don't, please, ask for any explanations," he begged. Though his voice did not betray emotion, the arm that touched hers trembled a little.

She stood still, startled, and glanced helplessly down the dark avenue she had come by

"Does this mean you wish me to leave you ?" he asked.

In the light cast by a lamp she saw his eager questioning look.

"Oh no !" she answered slowly, and it seemed as if someone else was speaking for her. "Now we've met, we need not part at once."

"That's what I think," he said, as gravely as if he were making an affirmation.

They walked on together in silence. Then he said in a lighter tone : " There's one thing I ought to draw your attention to. You have left your light burning. If you are so good as to spare me an hour, I am afraid it will cause you anxiety."

" Oh, never mind the light ! We'll go and put it out," she exclaimed joyously ; and turned on her heel so quickly that he was left two or three steps behind her.

As they crossed the slender span of the Hohenzollern Bridge, he pointed to the sky.

" Jupiter shines on our enterprise," he said. " I like him better than Venus, who gallivants after the sun, and will have a rosy carpet for her feet."

" Show me Jupiter," said Lilly, standing still.

Eagerly he pointed out to her the brilliant ruler of the heavens, and five or six constellations besides.

She clapped her hands with sheer delight. " Now I shall never feel lonely again in my flat," she cried, " when I am alone in the evenings and look out of the window."

While he waited for her at the foot of the staircase, she ran up, turned off the light, and put the latch-key in her pocket. She told Adele she would have supper out, and prepared to be off again.

Her heart was so full of ecstasy that she held on for a moment to the doorpost to prevent herself reeling, and gave a sob. But by the time she got downstairs she was quite herself again.

" If you will do me the honour to trust to my guidance," he said, " I know a corner where no one will disturb us, and where we shall be transported to Italy."

She gave a deep sigh. " Oh, how fond he is of talking about Italy ! " she thought. Yet she wouldn't have gone anywhere else for the world.

They pursued their way for five or six minutes along the dark bank of the canal, talking nonsense. Now the medley of lights on the Potsdamer Bridge were quite near, and he stopped before a small dimly lit window in which were displayed a dozen or so of wine-bottles wreathed with green cotton vine-leaves, looking like heads of asparagus popping out of the sand.

" Here Signore Battistini will serve us with a Chianti as good as any to be had in Florence," he declared.

They went in, and threaded their way through a small front

room where the proprietor, black as the devil himself, was pasting on labels behind the bar. He was greeted with "Sera, padrone" by Lilly's new friend. They passed into a long room full of rough tables and chairs. The only attempt at decoration were garlands cut out of green glazed paper, which were evidently ambitious of being taken for vines. They twined round the bare gas-brackets and cascaded over hooks on the wall, and in order that there should be no mistake as to what was the origin of all these festive tokens, a placard hung from the middle, wishing all who entered—at the end of March—a belated "Prosit Neujahr."

"How do you like this fairy-garden?" Lilly's friend asked her, as the waiter, black as his master, with eyes like fiery Catherine-wheels, beseechingly held out his hands for her cloak.

At the tables round them sat bushy-haired youths, who rolled long, thin cigars between their teeth, and nearly thrust their knuckles in each other's eyes as they gabbled Italian with fascinating rapidity.

"They are marble-cutters," Dr. Rennschmidt said *sotto voce*, "employed by our leading sculptors. They earn a lot of money, and when they have saved enough go home to start housekeeping."

Among them were two ladies. They wore their black lustreless hair so low on their foreheads that their eyes resembled torches burning out of a dark forest. They had gold rings in their ears, and their low-cut dresses were clasped by barbaric brooches. They glanced up at Lilly's tall figure with envious admiration, and then began an animated conversation in whispers.

Dr. Rennschmidt bowed to them cordially, with an air that seemed to say he had nothing to conceal and nothing to confess. He told her that they were mandoline singers belonging to a troupe of Neapolitans, whose manager had thrown them over, and they were now in search of an engagement.

"Where am I?" Lilly thought.

It was like a dream, as if magic wings had wafted her into a strange country; only the genial "Prosit Neujahr," on the placard swinging close to her, reminded her that Germany, Berlin, and the Potsdamer Bridge were not far off.

"I have come here every day since my return," Lilly's friend said, as they made themselves at home in a corner.

"Nostalgia for the South still afflicts me. The most perfect German cooking has no charms for me now, and I must have my Chianti. To-day we will, however, drink something else, because the palate has to acquire a taste for Chianti."

He beckoned to the waiter, who was called Francesco, just as if he had stepped out of a romance about knight-errantry and brigands—and after a lively discussion between the two a dusty, light-coloured bottle was produced and put on the table. Then came dishes of curious-looking macaroni and meat bathed in orange-red sauce.

Lilly could not remember that she had ever tasted anything half so good, and she told him so ; in fact, altogether she had never enjoyed herself so much in all her life. But this she did not tell him.

They wound up with a dish of fruit—called "*giardinetto*"—mandarins, dates, and gorgonzola cheese. The yellow wine, which had a perfume of nutmegs, frothed in the glasses, radiating tiny bubbles.

Leaning back against the wall, she let her eyes rest dreamily on her new friend. He turned his head from side to side with quick little movements rather like a bird. Everywhere he found something to observe, to remark upon, to absorb him ; or perhaps he did it all to be specially entertaining to her. His eyes sparkled with eagerness and zest in life ; the wrinkles on his forehead rose up and down, and what she had mistaken for a cloud of wrath was, after all, only the expression of his brain's boiling activity.

He had a dear, funny habit, which heightened this effect : he would put his outspread fingers to his head as if he were going to run them through a mass of hair ; but no hair was not there, and so he clapped his hand instead on his bare temples. He seemed compounded of force and resolution, which commanded her admiration and even awe. But his physique was not of the most robust, although a golden-brown hue of health, fresh from the South, tinged his cheek. His throat was delicate, his breath from time to time came in gasps, and when his eyes became veiled with fatigue, after some introspective probings, there was something pathetically boyish about him that awakened maternal tenderness.

"Ah, so this is you !" she thought, and stretched herself in blissful languor. "This is you at last, at last."

"Why do you shut your eyes?" he asked, concerned. "Aren't you feeling well?"

"Yes, oh yes," she said, flattering him with her eyes and mouth. "But do, please, tell me more about the land of my desires, where I have always wanted to go and where I have never been."

She then described to him her youthful longing, which the consumptive master had awakened in her, the longing which had continued to smoulder amidst the ashes of her life's experience.

"In your place I should have tramped there as a bare-footed pilgrim," he said.

"Oh, but I've had money enough to go often. I could have afforded it perfectly well. Once I was as far on the road as Bozen. But I had to turn back as a punishment because a young man made eyes at me."

"How sad!" he said, laughing. "That was hard lines on you, harder than you have any conception of."

"I have some conception," she sighed. "I have only got to look at you to be convinced of how hard it was."

"Why me?"

"Because you shine like Moses after he had looked on the glory of the Lord."

He became serious at once. "There are glories here, too, if we have eyes to see them," he said. "But, nevertheless, you are right. I am so chock-full of the life and reflected radiance that I have stored up there, so many sources have been opened out, so many seeds have germinated, that I scarcely know how to use all my vast wealth. I write till my fingers bleed, and there is always more to write. . . . I want to give, give, and go on giving; but to whom I don't know."

"To me!" she implored, holding out her hands, palms upwards. "To me! I am so desperately poor. Such a beggar!"

With the stern eyes of a visionary he gazed down on her. "You are not poor," he said. "You have merely been allowed to starve."

"Isn't it the same thing?"

He shook his head, still fixing her with his gaze.

"What was your husband?" he asked next.

"I . . . am the divorced wife . . . of an



officer of high rank," she replied, dropping her eyes to the floor.

Thank God ! This time she had not lied.

But hadn't she ? What was she *now* ? For a moment he pressed her hand, which lay on the table.

"Don't speak of your past if you would rather not," he said ; "leave it for the present. When we are old friends it'll be time enough. I'll tell you about myself and how I came to think of my great work."

"The work that you mentioned just now ? " she asked, curiously moved by the sudden solemnity of his tone.

Breathing deeply, he stretched out his clenched fists, and his eyes burned into space.

"Yes ; the work for which I live . . . the work that is my pillar of strength, my goal, my future—my everything . . . that stands for father, mother, brother, friend, and love. . . . For *it*, this wine was vintaged, this hour created, and you yourself, dear gracious, beautiful one, with your delicate infinite charm, and your two begging hands, which really were made for giving."

"I thought you were going to talk about your work," she said softly.

"I am talking about it—of that and that alone. I want you to know how all that I live and love is part of it. For instance, think of the thousands of times the Annunciation has been painted, sculptured, and sung, and how I have toiled and moiled over the subject, and yet now at this moment when I see your great wistful 'Mary-eyes' fixed on me in half-humble, half-astonished questioning, I feel that the last word has not been said, the highest rung of knowledge has yet to be reached. . . . So you see how everything must be made to serve my work."

"Are you a poet ? " she asked, quite carried away.

He shook his head, smiling. "I am not a poet, I am not an artist, neither am I an historian nor a psychologist ; but I have to be all and a great deal more besides, for my work demands it."

Then he told her his whole story. His father, a university professor and distinguished jurist, had died young, not long after the death of his mother, at his birth. His uncle, a wealthy old bachelor who had travelled a great deal both on business and pleasure, had adopted him. He had

given him a good education, and since made him an allowance sufficient to indulge his modest whims and requirements. Acting on his uncle's wishes he had gone abroad, and postponed for a time entering on the same academic career as his father, owing to his health having suffered severely from the strain of the examination, which he had passed with honours. His studies and researches in the history of art, which he had always pursued with ardour, had finally drawn him to Italy. More than churches and museums and picture galleries the teeming humanity and charm of personality in the Southern race attracted and enchanted him. It seemed to him as if contact with it awakened in him a new fresh human impulse and consciousness of his own powers. He was more than ever strongly impressed by the original unity of artistic endeavour and personal experience both in history and modern life. . . . Heroes of mythology and history, characters in poetry and painting, the creators and painters, too, all became to him so objective, so alive, that they seemed a part of his being. He had felt nearer than ever before to penetrating into the emotional world of bygone ages when living in the midst of a people who were saturated with history, yet in their thousand-year-old practice of Art had never lost touch with their own epoch. He learned to discriminate and date at first sight monuments of various periods, and trace them back step by step down the centuries. Creative Art was, and always would be, his inspiration and guide. . . . Art was able, above all, to wring speech from the dumbness of death, and to create new forms out of the dust of ages. The only thing still lacking was the key to the origin of all this amazing and convincing force. The A B C of the language was not forthcoming.

Lilly, with strained attention, strove to follow him. She had never heard anyone talk like this, and yet much that he said sounded familiar. It seemed to her as if some residue of long-past days left on the floor of her mind echoed to his ideas.

"One day it happened," he continued, "that while I was in Venice I started off on an excursion to Padua. By rail it is about as far as from Berlin to Potsdam. I was not attracted there by its art, for I was still on my honeymoon with the Early Venetians. I went for the sake of completeness. So I found myself in the little chapel where Giotto's frescoes are. You know him?"

"Giotto and Cimabue—of course," she answered proudly.

"Then I needn't explain further. I hadn't much enthusiasm left for him and his school, for, as I said just now, the Quattrocentists had turned my head. Now, please picture a ruined Roman amphitheatre overgrown with ivy—nothing but the outside walls still stand, like the walls of a garden—and somewhere in the middle the little chapel built of slates, every bit as bare as a Protestant conventicle in the royal realm of Prussia."

Lilly smiled. A fling at Protestantism always gratified her, like a personal favour.

"Services are no longer held there. It has been preserved as a national monument. When I first went in I saw nothing for a minute but a blue glory on the walls—a sort of background of light—then picture after picture, in long rows. The history of the Saviour told simply, just as a poor friar would tell it to poor people on Good Friday, provided he was the right sort of preacher."

"But are we not all *poor* people in the Saviour's eyes?" she ventured to put in shyly.

He paused, stared at her for a moment, and then assented with fervour. "Certainly we are, and not only in the Saviour's, but in those of every great personality, and every great truth. . . . But that feeling is not easy to cultivate . . . the feeling that we must be poor if what is given us is to make us rich. Religion can inspire us with it if it finds the right means of expression. In this case it was found. Here was a poor man speaking to the poor, and therein lay the richness of his gift. Then what in him goes to our hearts and brings tears to our eyes is not his great power, but quite the opposite—his lack of power. Do you grasp my meaning?"

"I think so," she said, her face lighting up. "When someone would beg anything of us and can only stammer out what he has got to say, we are far more touched than if he expressed himself in a stilted speech learnt by heart."

"Yes, that is exactly what I mean," he cried, delighted. "And it is from this bald, hesitating speech that the whole language of Art has arisen. Then, all that preceded it was merely a lifeless copy of worn-out Byzantine models. Here, for the first time, was an artist who, out of the simplicity of his heart, went straight to Nature for what he had to say. For this reason he became the supreme master of them all."

And to-day whoever may succeed in depicting with his brush the acme of joy and the acme of sorrow has to thank that little chapel."

"I can well believe," cried Lilly, "that if the ocean had a source, and a man suddenly came upon it, he would feel as you did at Padua."

He caught her arm with both hands in his excitement.

"You have hit on the missing simile," he said, "and it is graphic enough to describe to the letter what took place within me. And yet another source was revealed to me all of a sudden, while I, with folded hands, made the tour of those walls. My work was there, leaping out of nothingness. I said to myself, 'You must write the History of Effects.' The effects, as Art, not only Creative Art, has created, seen, and represented them through the ages. Pictorial Art is only a part, you see; there are besides the elocutionary arts, poetry as well as painting, sculpture as well as music. It struck me that by adopting this method I might succeed in producing a real genuine record of the development of human emotions, which no historian, moralist, or psychologist has ever yet attempted. But why should it not be attempted? Material is hidden everywhere, and awaits elucidation just as fossils lie embedded in the rocks ready for the zoologist's hammer. Tell me what you think of my plan? Is it not worth a lifetime's labour?"

"Indeed, I think it is," she said, with the same solemn air as before. Had she been requested at this moment to sacrifice her own life on the altar of his work, she would have done it without a moment's hesitation.

"Ah! but there is a lot to think over first. One cannot start at a tangent," he continued. "Often Art leads us astray because she has deliberately tried to reflect something quite different from the spirit of her time. Whether she succeeded or not is another question. Often, too, the right channels of expression were lacking. Ah! you and I must have many, many more talks together. Don't look so horrified at the idea. Yes, my dear gracious one, I need you sorely. After this evening I can't do without you, for no one has ever listened to me so intelligently and sympathetically. And I have become such a stranger here, it's almost as if I were a foreigner. All the men I know are so wrapped up in their own interests that they hardly listen to me. Besides, I am conscious that

my undertaking is a little mad. But there is solace to be derived from that when one thinks how every great work is supposed to be a little mad till it is finished and has accomplished its aim. Of course, everyone thinks the same about his own work, and I shall get over the feeling in time. But during the period of wrestling, when every day I think I have found a new vein of gold, and perhaps have to reject it afterwards as dross, if I have nobody to whom I can pour out my soul, I get into such a muddle I feel fairly disheartened. And now fate has sent you to me, and the thought of you has prevented my sitting calmly at my desk; a voice has seemed to call me to come out and gaze across at your light. Well, now I have you, I won't let you go in a hurry. I shouldn't, God knows, be so bold if it were for myself alone, but it's for my work. It clamours for you. Good heavens! why are you crying?"

She pressed the back of her hand against her eyes, and said, smiling at him, "I am not crying." But fresh tears gushed forth and dimmed the image of her loveliness.

"I can understand what it is," he said regretfully. "I have been inconsiderate, and by talking so happily of my own work I have revived your grief about your old art. I am very sorry."

She started back as if she had seen a ghost. Then, with a violent effort, she collected herself.

"No, no; that isn't it. Really, it isn't," she assured him.

But he persisted in reproaching himself, and his every word was a stab, when she thought of her own unworthiness.

"Let us go," she begged. "So many conflicting feelings overwhelm me. I am both happy and unhappy. . . . Outside in the air I shall be calmer."

It was long past midnight when they left the restaurant. A cold wind rippled the water and sighed among the bare branches.

He offered her his arm, and she clung to it as if she had been at home there for countless ages. Neither spoke for some time.

"In five minutes he'll be gone," she thought, and she could hardly bear the pain the threatened parting cost her.

"I have it on my conscience," he said at last, "that I have made so much of my work in our conversation you will think me conceited. I know it's not of greater importance

than hundreds of other people's. I believe that in nearly every vigorous-minded young manhood there is such a goal to strive for, and to point the way. One fellow may have a book to write, another a great business to work up, a third may have others dependent on him, and many find it as much as they can do to swim against the current. It's all the same thing. If we let ourselves drift, we're lost ; and none of us want to be lost, do we ? "

" I think I lost myself long ago," she whispered, shuddering.

He laughed out loud. "*You*, noblest, tenderest, best of women ! "

She knew how undeserved it all was, yet how sweet it was to hear him say it !

They were now walking so close to each other that their cheeks nearly touched. She closed her eyes, drinking in the warm breath of the strong life beside her. She felt that without volition she was being carried away to unknown blissful regions. She only came to herself when they stood before her door.

" When ? " he asked.

To-morrow she was not free. She had been invited out. The day after to-morrow ?

Yes, the day after to-morrow she would have the whole evening. He might call for her.

Then, in fear that if she lingered she would say that she could see him to-morrow, she ran upstairs and hid her joy in the solitude of her rooms. She did not turn on the lights ; the reflection of the street-lamps playing on the walls and the prisms of the chandelier was light enough.

Then she began to roam through the open doors, from room to room, into the corner where the bed stood, round the dining-table, across the corner drawing-room into the cold guest-chamber where no guest had ever been, up and down, up and down, singing, weeping, exulting. And then out of her tears, her humming and rejoicing, words came suddenly :

" Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field ; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards."

No, that was not exactly how it went. Something was not quite right ; but she would find out what it was.

She wrenched back the lid of the piano, which hadn't been opened for a long time, and, as if the neglected and silenced old keys had acquired a voice of their own, a perfect volume of sound rushed forth, which she could never have believed herself or the piano capable of producing.

"Let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender  
grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth ; there will  
I give thee my loves."

Yes, that was it ! She had got it now—every bar, every note. Where had it hidden itself all these long years ? It seemed like yesterday that she had sung it for the last time.

And yet what worlds of suffering lay between !

"No, not suffering ! If it had been nothing but suffering," she thought, "'The Song of Songs' would never have become mute."

## CHAPTER XIII

THE next morning, on waking, new troubles faced her. Nobody could be so blind as not to detect, sooner or later, what a rotten existence hers was ; least of all he whose refinement, at every spiritual contact, awoke in her an anxious echo. Even if she could keep from him every contamination of the world she lived in, and create in it an isolated platform on which to associate with him alone, would not her appearance at last betray her ? All those nights of wild dissipation surely must have left some traces behind. It was two years ago that Dr. Salmoni had spoken of the " cold contempt " in her eyes.

She jumped out of bed and ran to the looking-glass to subject every feature to a suspicious scrutiny. Her eyes had a tired look, it was not to be denied ; but there was no contempt in their expression. *He* had called them " Mary eyes," not Madonna eyes. Was there a difference, she wondered ? There were a few faint lines on her forehead, but these she could almost rub out with her finger. A little massaging was all that was necessary. Worse were the lines on either side of her mouth, giving to her face a *blasé*, rather haughty look.

" The paths that devouring passion long has trod," she quoted from " Tannhäuser in Rom," which she knew almost by heart.

Yet, had she not preserved all that was best and deepest in her nature, as if she must guard it, for one who was to come into her life ? And now that he had come, the *one*, it might perhaps be too late.

The day passed in fretting and worrying, and when Richard appeared at tea-time he found her with red eyes. She learnt this afternoon what a treasure she possessed in Richard. He asked her so few questions, was so full of tactful solicitude, that for a few moments at least she felt comforted and



sheltered. She was almost tempted to confide in him what she had gone through the last day or two. Was he not her kindest friend? Fortunately, however, she refrained. She would rather, on the whole, tell Adele, who on several occasions had let fall the encouraging remark that her mistress might place absolute confidence in her, as she knew life too well not to take the lady's part.

Lilly, feeling that she could not endure any of "the crew" this evening, pleaded headache, and Richard did not grumble. But when night drew near she remembered that she had told Dr. Rennschmidt that she was going out, and in order not to be caught in a falsehood she hurriedly extinguished the light and sat brooding in the dark till bedtime.

In the morning the first post brought her a letter addressed in an unknown hand. He broke the seal. Oh, God! What was this? Could these lines apply to her, to Lilly Czepanek, who was eating her heart out in morbid self-humiliation?

If anyone on the face of the earth could think of her like this, especially he, the grandest and best of all—for these verses were his, without any manner of doubt, though there was no signature—then, after all, things were not going so badly with her. The life she led had not as yet entirely mastered her; the innermost core of her being remained unaffected; there must still be latent good in her, which if used might be a blessing to herself and to others.

After she had learnt the verses by heart, she went on reading them over and over again, as she could not tear her eyes away from the beloved handwriting.

Then she tried to set them to music. She opened the piano and improvised, and, as on the previous evening, her playing came back to her. Soon she could play once more all the things she had known years ago and long since forgotten. She just struck the notes and everything came back. But her fingers were stiff, and her wrists and the muscles of her forearm soon ached. She must exercise them and get them supple again. Then when he came to see her she would be able to play him something classical. This hope still further increased her new-born self-esteem, and she began to count the hours till evening.

When Richard came in the afternoon he found her at the piano practising diligently.

"What's come over you?" he asked. "I had no idea you could play so well."

"Nor I," she replied, laughing.

"You must show what you can do when we're out this evening."

"This evening?" she exclaimed, horrified. "I thought that I was free this evening."

"Free! I don't know what you mean by 'free,'" he answered irritably. "You talk as if our going out together were a sort of martyrdom. You get off whenever you can trump up an excuse. Only yesterday Karla was saying no one knew what you did with yourself when you were alone."

"I should have thought that applied much more to Karla than to me," she replied. "No one even knows her real name."

"That's nothing to do with it. She is not the only person who has remarked how reserved you are. I have been advised by a man to look after you a little more, and not let you go your own way so much. To shut them up I promised to bring you this evening instead of yesterday; and I must keep my word."

Lilly quickly reflected that opposition to his wishes would not help her, and only give him further cause for suspicion, so she bravely choked back her tears and disappointment. But when he was gone she suffered all the more acutely, and her grief and despair knew no bounds.

What would her new friend think of her if he came at the appointed time and found her not at home? She could not send a note to put him off, for he had not given her his address, and he would have twenty-four hours in which to think the worst of her.

As a last resource she confided in Adele. Her dry, sour face brightened perceptibly, for deception of any kind was meat and drink to her. She proposed that the gracious mistress should say that she had been summoned to a friend's sick-bed. Such sad occurrences, she knew by experience, always appealed to gentlemen; and Lilly agreed to act on her advice.

The round-table derived little amusement from her society that evening. She ignored the men and was rude to the ladies. Frau Julia, the only person she wanted to see, was absent, as she had been often of late. They soon left her to her own

devices, and the worthy Richard, who had imagined he was going to show her music off, gnawed the ends of his moustache in helpless vexation.

The next morning she again suffered torments. She had roused up Adele in the middle of the night, and learned that he had been and had gone away again, greatly perturbed.

Another day passed in nervous counting of the hours. She stood before the glass and arrayed herself for him despondently. She would have liked to throw herself at his feet, but in spite of this she resolved to adopt a certain melancholy quiet dignity in her manner towards him, which would nip suspicion in the bud and make him feel that she tallied with the ideal depicted in his verses. Had he not in them termed her flighty, flirtatious head a "head divine"? The mere thought made her feel holy.

At half-past seven the bell rang. She received him with a conventional "How do you do?" and smile; and the quiet melancholy hauteur, which she assumed, became her remarkably well, and effectually concealed her chagrin and anxiety.

His manner, too, was not so composed and frank as usual. At a single glance she perceived it. His eyes wandered beyond her with a curiously vacant expression.

"He guesses everything," a voice cried within her.

But she knew how to control her feelings. "I must apologise," she said, "that I was unable to keep my appointment with you yesterday."

"Is your friend better?" he inquired; and a smile of scornful incredulity played about his lips.

She now said anything that came into her head, and although she did not look at him, she knew that he did not believe a syllable.

"I also must apologise," he said, with the same covert scorn in smile and voice.

"Why, Dr. Rennschmidt?"

"I took the liberty of sending you a few verses, which I hope you accepted in the spirit in which they were written—merely as an exercise in style, without any special application or significance."

"He is cooling already," her consciousness of guilt told her. And so all the colder and more unconcerned was her answer.

"Your pretty lines did rather surprise me at first, as I

couldn't conceive why they should be addressed to me, but afterwards it occurred to me that it might be what you have just said it was, and I did not mind. If you don't object, I would rather not talk about it any more."

He gazed at her with eyes dilated from amazement, and she was glad that she had driven her thrust home with such bitterness.

Next she asked him if he would have supper with her, as she wished to do the right thing, though nothing had been prepared for a guest.

"I thought that I had been given permission to call for you and take you out," he said in a cold, disillusioned tone.

She smiled graciously. "If you wish, I shall be happy to come," she said.

In silence they descended the staircase, in silence they walked along the bank of the canal—the same path that they had taken, in such rapturous proximity to each other, three evenings ago. They had been silent then, but what a different silence it had been from this.

"What have you been doing the last few days?" she asked, for the sake of saying something.

"Nothing special," he replied. He had been trying to write an article for a Munich art paper, to which he was a contributor, on the subject of the Siennese School outside Sienna. But he hadn't succeeded. His editor wouldn't be satisfied with his stuff.

She read in his words a reproach to herself. Obviously he wished to imply that her entrance into his life was to blame. And when he asked to which restaurant she would like to go, she was so hurt that she begged to be excused.

"I am neither hungry nor thirsty," she said, "and lights and people would jar on me."

"If you would rather avoid people, we might perhaps turn into the Tiergarten?"

She acquiesced; and if he had proposed plunging with him into the canal she would have consented even more readily.

Before them stretched the roads of the park like long galleries with garish walls of electric light, between which one was obliged to run the gauntlet. The pedestrians who came towards them stared at this tall pair, as they passed, with cold impertinent curiosity.

"This is worse than the crowded streets," she said. Her sore heart fluttered dully with excitement.

He indicated a side path that was dark, and without speaking a word they dived into the benighted solitude. Above the dense canopy of branches the sky showed through rents in the clouds like tarnished metal, reflecting the city's glare. The glimmer of lamps from the great main avenues twinkled through the lattice-work of bare shrubs, and the bells of the electric tramways, shooting hither and thither at a short distance, sounded like repeated fire-alarms. Yet, here in the thickets of the park, stillness and darkness reigned. You felt as if you were being swallowed up by a sea of black oblivion. Every moment the silence grew more oppressive. Then, all at once, he hurried a step in front of her to bar her progress.

"What is the matter?" she asked, frightened.

"I am going to say something to you now," he began, "something which will either bring us together again, or estrange us more than ever—in fact, end everything. . . . I was too great a coward just now, and tried to prevaricate. When I said I did not mean my verses seriously I was not speaking the truth. I felt all that I wrote, only I felt it a thousand times more strongly. But I should have refrained from expressing my feelings. . . . I know now that it must have alarmed you. It has caused you to change your opinion of me. You may be thinking that I am a mere seeker of love adventures, who has tried to make capital out of your trust and confidence. I promise you, dear gracious one, never to annoy you by revealing my feelings again. But don't withdraw your friendship, I earnestly entreat you. . . . Please do not. . . . Think what will become of me if I lose you now!"

Ah! so this was it! This! It was this deviation from an excess of reticence which had divided and stood between them. Oh, would to God there had been nothing else! She could not help herself; she just leaned against a tree and burst out crying. Her tears came with such force that her veil was soon drenched through and through. She had to throw it back and press her hands against her eyelids.

"For God's sake, what is it?" she heard him ask in a voice quite husky from anxiety. "Have I wounded you so deeply? Is what I have said so bad? I will retract everything; only forgive me—you must forgive me!"

When he thus asked her forgiveness for all the infinite joy he had given her, her passion leapt up and set her on fire. The pose of haughty dignity—aye, and her shame too—she cast to the winds; and with a groan of abandonment she flung her arms round his neck, pressed herself against him, and clung to his mouth with her lips and teeth.

Under the onslaught of this wild and impure embrace he recoiled, and in thrusting her from him he dug his fingers deeply into the upper part of her arm. How it hurt, but how she liked it!

"At last! at last!" her soul cried. Now he knew who and what she was, and how much she had to give him.

When she gained command of herself again, she saw him leaning against the same tree from which she had sought support a moment before. His hat had fallen off, his eyes were closed. He was as pale and inanimate as death.

For a moment all was still save for the clanging bells of the electric trams from the near distance.

"Dearest, beloved," she whispered, stooping and leaning against his knees. "Wake up, darling; wake up and come."

He opened his eyes and stared at her as if his wits were wandering.

"Come, come!" she cried joyously. "Come away from here. Come home. I don't want to wander about any more here in the dark among the trees, or in the restaurants and streets. I want to go home. With you, with you!"

He did not answer. He seemed quite distracted. A dull sense of guilt awoke in her, to be quickly drowned in exultation.

"Come, come to me!"

With both hands she drew him from the spot that had become the cradle of her happiness—and of his too. His happiness stunned him and robbed him of his senses; was there anything very extraordinary in that? When Lilly Czepanek, whom hundreds of men had wanted in vain, gave herself voluntarily it was enough to turn any man's brain. And as they made their way through avenues and streets she poured out her pent-up soul to him in an avalanche of chatter.

Didn't he realise what unheard-of folly it was for him to cherish any doubts? From the very first moment she had been his. A miracle had been worked for both of them. Never had she known what love really was till the day when

she had whistled to the squirrels skirmishing above their heads. . . . Life had been nothing to her since then. . . . There was nothing in the world that mattered except him—him and his eyes, his mouth, his great purpose, his splendid wonderful work, for which she was ready to work like a galley slave, and which she would enrich with her love; for in his researches amongst ancient pictures and books he could gather nothing but the grey ashes of love. She could teach him—she, Lilly Czepanek—what true fresh young love meant; she who had been waiting for him ever since she could remember. Had she not belonged to him before the world began? God had meant them for each other. Nothing could be clearer than that, because they had both felt that they had met each other before. And so they had, in some dream-life. Yes, they had met in their dreams, for she had dreamed of him always—always. It was all just like what one read of in fairy-tales.

"Perhaps it *is* a fairy-tale! You—you whose Christian name I don't even know yet—but what does that matter? Say, say it is *not* a fairy-tale."

But he said nothing. He walked on like a man walking in his sleep. He followed her mechanically up her staircase, and stood stiffly under the chandelier in the middle of the corner drawing-room, into which she had led him, gazing round him in shy uncertainty, as if he had never been in the room, and was puzzled to know how he had got there.

She clasped him to her playfully, saying he should rest and close his eyes. Then she helped him off with his overcoat, forced him into an arm-chair, and kissed his eyes till his lids drooped and he lay there as if really asleep.

"Rest there, beloved, till I come back," she said.

And away she ran, bursting with joyous excitement, to the kitchen to tell Adele to get supper as soon as possible. Next, she hurried into her room and changed the rustling silk she was wearing for a pale-blue tea-gown with turquoise embroideries, in which Richard used gallantly to declare she looked like Venus herself. She loosened her hair to make it look more curly, and took off all her rings. A single plain gold bracelet was her only ornament.

The sulky Adele, who had transformed the table like magic into a flower-garden, was actually beaming, for at last it seemed as if a little human comedy was to come off in this

dully respectable, disorderly household. The plate gleamed on the clean damask cloth, and golden-yellow bananas and pears sent forth a fragrance from the dessert-dishes.

He ought to be as satisfied as she was. Her heart beat normally now; she had lost all fear. She would have felt like a conquering heroine if she had not been so humble in her joy. One thing she could be proud of, and that was, she had so much, so very much to give him.

When she went into the drawing-room again, she found him no longer resting in the arm-chair. He was standing at the writing-table, absorbed in contemplating Richard's photograph, to her great discomposure. If only she had thought of slipping it into a drawer; but now it was too late. He let his eyes glide over her Venus draperies in perplexity; then he caught hold of both her hands.

"Why have you made yourself so beautiful for me?" he asked.

"I wanted you to feel just a little bit at home here," she said, letting her eyes fall. "Nothing more. Now come to supper. You know we've had nothing to eat this evening."

"Eat and drink *now* . . . But I will sit with you at the table, if you like, while you eat."

"Then I won't have anything, either," she said, putting her arm round his neck and drawing him so closely to her that the pressure almost took her breath away.

Peterle, the small monkey, who had been asleep in his corner, now woke, and made a little jealous whimper as he stretched his grey hands through the bars as if to plead his right to be a third in the compact.

The strange sound made the guest start.

Lilly smilingly reassured him. "After supper I must introduce you to my little people. My friends must be your friends, you know."

He drew himself up. "How can you? What would you introduce me as?" he asked.

"Oh no!" Lilly protested; "I did not mean anything of that kind. I only meant . . ." She couldn't say what.

Then she felt her arm clasped in his trembling fingers. His eyes burned into hers.

"Who are you?" he asked.

She felt a little giddy. "Who am I? . . . I am a woman who loves you as you have never been loved by anyone."



He passed his hands over her shoulders in a grateful caress. "I must make you understand me clearly," he said. "I don't want to force your confidence. But when two beings have stood as near to each other as we have during the last hour, they naturally want to know everything there is to know. I have never met a woman in the least like you before. I am quite ignorant, for the one or two little experiences I have had count as nothing. In Rome a baker's daughter was in love with me, but she ran away with a marquis. In my student days I had a few other affairs of the kind. That is all. I have been in society very little. And now, all at once, here I am with you in my arms—you, the most glorious and perfect thing I have ever seen in my life! A woman who hardly seems to belong to this world at all. . . . I cannot take my eyes off you in your blue *peplus*. . . . You stand there the image of an antique statue, a masterpiece of Lysippus or Praxiteles come to life. And I am to call that mine? Why, the mere thought is sheer tragedy. We are both making for a precipice without an attempt to save ourselves."

"Why should we?" she cried, throwing back her head in ecstasy, as if she were tossing back a bacchant's wild locks. "We love each other, and nothing else matters."

He sank into the chair next her, and with dry tearless sobs buried his face in his two hands. She knelt down in front of him, and bending forward planted little fugitive kisses on his clenched hands.

"No!" he cried, springing up again, "this must not be. I must not let myself be driven into a false position. You may think as you do, and be willing to sacrifice all that you have and are—very well. But I, who am to accept such infinite goodness—I must speak out, so that you will be quite clear for whom you are doing it. I must not leave open a shadow of a possibility of your being misled. I am a poor young chap living on his uncle's bounty. I have no prospects, for my great work is still in embryo, and the articles I write are nothing to speak of. I have still to win by unremitting toil a *pied-à-terre* in life. It may take me ten years. . . . I could never submit to being supported by you. You must think what you will of me, but I say now, once for all, that a marriage between us is out of the question."

At first she could hardly believe her ears. Here was someone so unworldly, so naïve and ingenuous, as actually to

mention marriage seriously in Lilly Czepanek's corner drawing-room ! Then she laughed shrilly, in scorn of her shameless life.

"Do you take me for an adventuress who inveigles men into her net ? " she cried, jumping to her feet. "Do you take me for a harpy ?"—Frau Julia's expression came back to her—"a harpy who tries to catch every person she chances to meet ? Am I such a miserable wretch ? "

He stared at her face with an astonished, uncomprehending glance.

"The woman who loves a man and desires to give him his crowning happiness is not a 'miserable wretch,' " he said.

Ah, then he really meant it !

She thought of the days when she had still been innocent enough to wish she was Richard's wife. How long ago was that ? She must have sunk low indeed for this most natural relationship between man and woman to appear so strange to her !

She shuddered and felt she was turning pale. What if he had noticed ? She could bear anything but that. Shrinking from his searching eyes, she replied timidly :

"I only wanted you to understand that you are free, and can always be free. You can go when you like, at any time, and have nothing to fear."

"And you ? " he asked.

"What about me ? "

"In what position should I leave you if I went ? "

"Oh, that would be my lookout," she exclaimed, laughing.

That was such a remote contingency, why should they worry about it to-day ? But he was not satisfied.

"There is something inscrutable about you. A touch of mystery. . . . How shall I put it ? Some wrong seems to cast a shadow upon you. . . . You say that you go into society a great deal, yet I cannot get over the feeling that you are lonely and perhaps unprotected. When I try to penetrate farther into your soul, I feel that in some way or other you have been harshly dealt with. . . . From now onwards I shall stand by you as protector and adviser, but I am handicapped in being so ignorant of the world and its ways. It might happen that with every good intention I should only increase the mischief. . . . And I don't want to do that, because to me you are hallowed. So I beg

of you now to tell me as much as you feel you can and may, of all that you have lived through and suffered. Will you?"

She felt now that evasion was no longer possible. The hour of which she had been in dread and had tried to postpone indefinitely had sounded. Again a phrase of Frau Julia's came into her mind: "The way back to the community of all the virtues is only made by lying."

With lying she had begun, with lying she must continue. For a moment the wish rose in her heart to tell him the whole truth, but that would be insane folly, absolutely suicidal. After all, it was not necessary to lie. She had only to put a different complexion on her life's story, to tell it as if it had been what to-day she would like it to appear.

"I'll turn down the lights," she said, and extinguished the crystal-white flames of the chandelier, leaving only the rose-shaded standard lamp to cast a subdued glow on their corner.

His hands in hers, leaning her head against his shoulder, she began her whispered and halting confession.

She told him of her sheltered, merry childhood, free from care and full of music, which played the part of both fairy and demon in her youth; of her father's flight and the beginning of poverty and desperate struggles. So far she had withheld nothing, perverted nothing. Even the colonel was not altered, except that from habit she now and again promoted him to the rank of general. Only, when Walter von Prell came into the picture for the second time, it seemed inevitable that fresh colours should be mixed on the palette; for she would, without doubt, descend rapidly in her friend's esteem if she owned that she had abandoned herself body and soul in light-hearted frivolity to a little ne'er-do-well. So she made of that incorrigible rascal an ill-fated laughing young hero, who had only been vanquished because all the powers were ranged against him.

Once started, the rest was smooth sailing. She invented a touching farewell scene, taking place amidst a thousand vows of faithfulness, floods of tears, and promised bridal prospects. The horrors of the duel, of which she had never taken the trouble to find out the particulars, were exaggerated to such a degree that her lover emerged from it an incurable cripple. He had set steam for America, firmly resolved not to turn up again in the old country till he was in a position to expiate

his misdeed by marrying her ; and he had in the meantime confided her as a sacred trust to his friend, a worthy, excellent young man, whose character was made up of nobility and unselfishness. It was the latter who, out of regard for the unhappy banished lover, had four years ago taken her fate into his keeping, kept watch over her, and introduced her into society. He had also, with rare tact and unselfishness, managed for her the little fortune saved from her days of affluence, and given her the support of his valuable advice and assistance in all questions concerning her everyday practical life. He came every day at tea-time to inquire courteously after her health, and he sometimes escorted her home from a theatre or social gathering, and had a cigarette afterwards. His circle of friends had become hers, and everyone they knew honoured and respected their relationship, as it was based on high-souled loyalty to his friend abroad.

Thus Lilly Czepanek related her story with so much conviction that she almost began to believe it herself. And was it not a fair enough account of her life, as Richard had represented it before her descent to the depths on the night of the Kellermann carnival ?

She did not mention either Kellermann or Dr. Salmoni, or make any reference to "the crew," which was natural enough ; but she spoke of her ill-fated art with tears and regret, and said it should be for the last time. She wished never to allude to it again.

When she had finished speaking and looked up at him with a feeling of relief, expecting to receive his absolution, she was startled at the change in his face. He had turned a deathly hue, his feverish eyes were cast up to the ceiling, and there were deep lines of pain in his cheeks.

"Doesn't he believe me ? " flashed through her brain.

He sprang up, seized Richard's photograph, which stood on the *escritoire* in a frame, and brought it close to the light of the shaded lamp.

She knew that he was thinking of Walter, and said, "That is not his photograph."

"Who is it, then ? "

"His friend . . . the manufacturer."

Disappointed, he threw the frame on one side. "Have you no picture of *him* ? "

Yes . . . she had, but where was it ? The big pastel

portrait was in the attic ; the smaller photograph she must have crammed away in some drawer.

" I put it away," she said apologetically ; " I could not bear seeing it before me every day."

The reason was not very clear. He could, if he liked, interpret it as her growing love for him. Yet, how pitiable and ludicrous it all was ! She would rather have thrown herself at his feet, and cried, " Forgive . . . forgive. Take me as I am ; don't cast me off ! " Instead, she was obliged to go on lying, disgracefully, desperately, like a common adventurer on the verge of being found out.

" Will you mind very much if I ask you to look for the photograph ? "

" Oh, my beloved ! Why do you torment yourself ? "

" Please look for it," he said.

Further resistance was not to be thought of. She fetched the key of the *escritoire*, unlocked and opened the drawers at random, and searched wildly, hardly seeing what she was doing, among the papers. Ah, here it was ! She hadn't looked at it for years. Imperiously and vindictively the light-lashed eyes glanced at her as much as to say : " Cheat, lie, and swindle. I have done it too."

" This is it," she said.

He took it to the light, stared long and earnestly at the features. His lips twitched, and he jerked the photograph nervously as he held it in his hand.

" Just as I once stood before the photograph of the young orphaned heiress," she thought ; but that was long ago.

Then she heard his voice asking hoarsely, " Will you answer a single question, which is of vital importance to me ? "

" Ask anything you like, dearest."

" Are you still building on the return of this young man ? "

Where did the question lead ? She felt she only had to say " No " to break down all obstacles. But if she did, the tale she had been telling her friend about Walter would be utterly without sense or meaning, and who could tell then if his suspicions would not at last be aroused ?

So she steered a middle course, and said, " Often I am inclined to doubt "—she hesitated over her words. " You see, I am waiting for two . . . There's my father, who seems to have vanished for ever. . . . I never hear from him either."

"And you feel yourself bound to him still?"

She felt the noose tightening about her neck.

"Answer me."

There was something in his tone that abolished every loophole of escape. She felt that it was a matter of life and death. She held up her arms as if taking a solemn oath.

"Since I have known you, I don't care one way or the other. If you wish me to be faithful to him, then I will wait for him . . . till the crack of doom; if you would rather I threw him over, I will do that too."

He laid his head back and closed his eyes. He stood now exactly as he had done in the dark bit of the park. And she felt the same anxiety on his behalf. "Why will he torture himself so?" she thought. And it occurred to her for the first time that he was taking her and everything she said in earnest; that he, to whom loyalty was a law, expected loyalty from her in the natural course of things. Ah, how little he knew!

She was so deeply ashamed of herself that she dared not question or come near him.

He drew himself up with a powerful effort, and she saw the cloud of wrath on his brow that had awed her the first day of their acquaintance.

"Listen," he said. "After what you have been telling me, I see that I was on a wrong tack. You are not lonely and forsaken, the world has not sinned against you. On the contrary, you are protected and cared for, and have a future, however uncertain, to look forward to. You would lose all this through me. His friend would not, of course, continue his support if he heard anything about me. And it would be the same with the others, who at present constitute your world."

She wanted to shriek with laughter, to whistle her contempt of all that had made up her life hitherto, but the sound was stifled in her throat. She recollected in time that to snap her fingers at her past might precipitate a catastrophe, which would expose the misery of her position. To him she might only belong in dark, secret hours.

"And what have I to offer you in compensation?" he continued. "Nothing. My work is still in the clouds. I am not even sure of myself. And when I think of this last hour——" He broke off and turned his eyes away.

"Then you don't love me?" she said in a depressed tone.

He flung himself on her chair, so that kneeling on the cushions he could encircle her waist with his hands.

"My God! be merciful! You see what I am enduring; don't make it harder. I should always be repeating to myself, every day and every hour, 'Over in America there's a fellow working himself to death for her. . . . He doesn't write because he is ashamed to confess how his maimed body is standing in his way and bringing all his enterprises to naught' . . . at least, I can think of no other reason for his silence—for no man could forget a woman like you. Meanwhile, I have stolen you from him, and sit here with you in my arms. . . . I don't know . . . the idea of a man leading a profligate life does not shock me . . . but to rob a poor hard-working cripple of his all . . . I think the meanest scoundrel in creation would draw the line at that. . . . I know I shall never get over it, but"—he collapsed, hitting his head against the arm of the chair, and sobbed—"better to part now, at once, on the spot, than wait till it is too late for both of us."

The blow had fallen. Cleverly as she thought she had garbled her story, she was caught in her own net.

"You mean that you will—oh God!" she cried.

He got up. "Good-bye," he said, "good-bye, and thank you. Do not think too harshly of me."

"If I tell him the truth now, it'll only make him go all the faster," she thought, looking round her helplessly.

His hands were held out waiting for hers; his eyes drank her in, as if by so doing he could imprint her image on his heart for ever.

"I will put myself in front of the door," she thought. "I will throw myself on him and suffocate him with kisses."

But the desire not to sink in his estimation made her timid and faint-hearted.

"Don't go yet," she besought him, clinging to his hands. "Stay one more hour, just one—a farewell hour."

He disengaged himself gently, and turned to the door.

She stood in the middle of the room, drawn up to her full height, the wide sleeves of her blue Venus drapery fell back from her arms, displaying their matured beauty, as she held them out to him beseechingly.

"If he sees me like this," she thought, "he will yet be mine."

But he did not look back. He staggered, and knocked his forehead against the panel of the door as he opened it; and then all at once it seemed as if he were wiped off the face of the earth, and with him light and everything. . . . A swarm of bees rose buzzing into the air, and in the darkness that suddenly surrounded her the floor sank deeper and always deeper towards the canal waters . . . a hatchet struck her on the head and then all was over.

At first it sounded like a twittering of birds, then like the murmur of an enormous crowd in a wide sunny square, and then there were only two voices left: a man's voice and a woman's whispering eagerly together—the old cook, Grete, and the manservant with the impudent twinkle in his eye. Yes, of course, it was they. The colonel would come in immediately and ask her to be his wife. At the same instant she felt something cool, damp, and soothing on her aching head. Just as she had felt that night. . . . "Am I to live through it all again?" she thought, startled, and she began to cry, and entreat, "Oh, please, Herr Colonel, let me go. I am far too bad a girl for you. Oh, dear Herr Colonel!"

"Good God! she is delirious," said the masculine voice, which was certainly not that of the impudent manservant.

Ah! how comforting it was to lie under the magic of this voice, in which a note of homeliness quivered.

"So he hasn't gone, after all," she thought, and leaned back contentedly on her cushion, which had been placed on the carpet as a support for her neck. If she had known his Christian name, she would have called him by it now. But she was still ignorant of it, even after all that had passed between them. What a shame it was! She could only put out her arms a little towards him in silence. He was already kneeling beside her, stroking her hands.

She must keep quiet, absolutely quiet.

"Will everything be all right now?" she asked, smiling up at him in bliss.

Yes, yes; everything. Ways and means must be found of seeing each other often as friends, as brother and sister. No; there should be no parting, no separation. No one was bound to inflict such hideous torture on himself as that.

She thought with a shudder of the moment when darkness had gathered in around her, and she had sunk into the



mire. So would her life always have been without him. But now, as brother and sister, they were free to greet in light-hearted joyousness a new dawn.

Such happiness was almost inconceivable.

She groped for his arm, and pillowed her cheek in the palm of his hand with a deep-drawn happy sigh. But Adele, who had all this time been discreetly looking out of the window, now interposed with the suggestion that a fresh compress was needed, as the wound in her mistress's forehead was still bleeding. And so it was adjusted.

## CHAPTER XIV

**I**N human development each spring, as it comes round, has its particular significance and associations. Every spring finds a man different; every one opens old wounds anew, and sounds hidden depths. Sometimes it passes like a stupid unprofitable game, because he himself is feeling stupid and unprofitable; others torment him with a thousand futile admonitions, because he is utterly unable to render account to his own conscience. Sometimes spring finds him barren and clogged, like ground that cannot recover from the ravages of winter. And, again, spring carols deceptive songs of liberation and redemption in a man's heart, as if it was in its power to liberate and redeem. But the most beautiful manifestation of spring is when we are scarcely aware of it, because its budding and sprouting is but symbolic of the jubilant stirring of spring within us, the widening and growth of our being spiritually.

Such a spring now dawned for Lilly. Everything seemed to wear a new face. The early sunshine had never before cut such grotesque little capers on the wall, never had there been such ravishing violet twilights at the end of rainy days, never had people worn such hopeful festive looks as they passed her, never had the din of street traffic sounded so full of an infectious revelling in activity.

Yes, and all at once she too found no end of things to do. Every hour was full of delightful and urgent engagements. If anyone had told her during the last few years that she would ever again, with burning cheeks and a feverish brain, get up dates, quotations, historical allusions, and foreign words, she would have laughed at them.

But now, whatever she did, she must not idle. As that time she had been ready with her answer about Giotto, so she must always have a response on the tip of her tongue when it was

expected of her. All her eagerness to learn, which had been quenched in her for years by a feeling of isolation and uselessness, now streamed forth anew. And her mind—like a starved and uncultivated pasture—absorbed everything it was offered with an insatiable maw. It demanded hardly an effort to commit things to memory; she had only to imagine that she was quoting to him, and lines remained with her.

She managed it all with the utmost secrecy, for Konrad—yes, that was his name, Konrad; he was called Konrad—must not suspect that her knowledge was brand-new and fresh from the mint. She sneaked alone to the museums and picture galleries because she wanted him to think she had been at home in them from time immemorial. Then she practised up several pieces of old music that might be of use to him in his work. And often did she bless her father's rigid discipline, which had kept her at the piano till late in the night.

They saw a great deal of each other. He came every other evening as a regular thing. He avoided the afternoons, knowing that they were devoted to the friend of her fiancé, but often in the middle of the day he bounded up the stairs with a book or a flower, and begged for a little music. He never would stay to lunch, however warmly she pressed him. For the most part he was not at his ease in her flat; he would walk up and down restlessly, look at his watch and then hurry off. At first she was hurt, and asked him teasingly if he thought he was in the enemy's country when he came to see her. But, of course, she did not yet thoroughly understand him. Every day revealed some new and unusual trait in his character.

He was still extremely young, not only in years. She had known many callous, *blasé* old men at twenty-five—which was his age. His youth was within him. His thoughts were young and passionate, and she had never met anyone who expended so much care on mere thinking. His ideas seemed to be to him tangible beings, with whom he had to come to grips and either hug to his heart or spurn with his foot. Friends or enemies to him were all the great thinkers and creators of other times. He associated with them as with masters and comrades; defied them or despised them; submitted reverently to their teaching, or made fun of them.

His thought and his conversation were a perpetual flow of

antitheses and a whirl of paradoxes, a forcible pushing forward of research, a ruthless sport. He could not be neutral or indifferent. He saw in everything problems that cried out for solution, questions of urgency in which it was necessary to take sides. He loved or he hated; there was no middle course for him.

She followed him and hung on his lips, with all the fervour of a disciple and lover. She annexed his ideas, and let them take root or die off in her mind as chance willed it. She had such riches to choose from that one more or less did not matter.

Of his personal affairs he talked very little. Not because he was reserved or lacking in confidence, but because he deemed them of no importance or interest. Lilly had to drag everything out of him, bit by bit.

The image of his parents had faded with time, though he still cherished an enthusiastic regard for their memory. For him his uncle had stood in the place of parents, the rich parvenu and man of the world, whose heir he would ultimately be, and to whom he now owed his freedom from sordid cares about money.

She could not quite make up her mind what their relations were to each other. Often he spoke as if he loved the old man tenderly, but at other times a hardness, even bitterness, crept into his judgment of him, showing that their natures were diametrically opposed, and there was a lack of harmony between them.

His friends were few—mostly old fellow-students, who went their own way—and he had no experience of family life. Thus he was able to bestow on Lilly all his free hours.

They met frequently in restaurants, oftenest in the little Italian wine-shop, where they wondered when the waiter turned out the lights, as it seemed to them that they had only just come.

Now and then they bought their supper at the butcher's and baker's for a few pence, and, laughing over their purchases, shook the dust of the town off their feet and retired to the Tiergarten. There they looked for an empty seat off the beaten track of the wide avenues, but not too lonely and remote. It was not till loving pairs began to wander by, like shades from the nether world, that they felt they were hidden and unseen. If a couple sat down beside them, they

were sure to get up again soon, for they needed the night and darkness more urgently than these two.

Then, when the pale-green lacework of leaves, which appeared quite detached from the grey branches, darkened gradually into a shadowy black ragged outline, when the fire of the evening sky toned down into the purple of night, when the nightingale—often only a few yards away—burst into song, then they watched shoulder to shoulder the stars come out one by one and illumine the twilight, which night after night became longer. Then their thoughts rose on wings to pictures and music, to sagas of the North and Italian olive-groves. Then questions of mystery and solemnity were mooted, hesitatingly and fearfully, and answered promptly with the charity and cocksureness of a joyous young scepticism.

Lilly was left in no uncertainty as to his opinion about the immortality of the soul, the origin of the universe, and God Almighty. Often she felt as if she were left shivering alone in a vast icy-cold wilderness where there was no All-loving Father, no hope of an after-life, and much less of a St. Joseph.

"Your creed, then, is simply atheism?" she asked nervously.

"If you like to call it so, yes," he replied, laughing.

She felt forthwith bound to become an atheist too—one of those who in the eyes of Holy Church must roast for all eternity in the depths of hell. But if he could exist under the bann of excommunication, so could she. Her only regret was for St. Joseph.

How long it was since she had given her dear saint a thought! Nevertheless, it would be a pity if she could never run to him again with her joys and sorrows—at least, never without feeling ashamed of herself—especially now when her soul was burdened with so many new and varied experiences. There was nothing restful and soothing in the high art that Konrad unfolded before her; rather did she feel perpetually stimulated and goaded on to further delights and excitements.

Together they listened to all the great orchestral works the spring produced. They heard the *Eroica*, Brahms's Second Symphony, and a gem of Grieg's beyond expression beautiful. At concerts they joined the crowd in the cheap places, which they both loved; their hands, touching as if by accident,

telegraphed with a slight pressure the vibrations of their souls' sympathy with some subtle passage of hidden beauty. Oh, what hours those were! And then those other hours which they spent high up among the "gods" at theatres, where they were far out of sight of "the crew." With Shakespeare's deathless characters, and Wagner's legendary heroines passing before her, how intensely did she realise the wretched barrenness of her previous life!

They did not neglect the modern drama either. Of all the plays he took her to, "Rosmersholm" moved her most deeply—she, with her load of concealed guilt, was the counterpart of Rebecca; he in his unsuspecting purity was Rosmer. His high-toned emotional life had, as it happened in the play, an ever-stronger and more elevating influence on hers. But what if the garbage in which her existence had its being should gradually revert from her on to him, would she not then be his evil genius and destroyer? The thought was intolerable. Even while the play was going on she cried so bitterly that she attracted the attention of people sitting near her, and Konrad proposed taking her out, but she indignantly refused to go.

Still sobbing and supported by his arm, she tottered home along the bank of the river, a path he had chosen because it was quieter and darker than the main street. When they came to the bridge across the Spree, she stopped, and seemed fascinated by the black waters below. He let her be, till she began to climb up the railed parapet to see "what it felt like." Then he pulled her down by force from her dangerous position.

"Why shouldn't I?" she thought. "When he knows all, I shall be bound to go down there—and alone."

After that evening, more anxiously than ever did she devote herself daily and hourly to keeping the slightest breath of suspicion from him. She was not ashamed of her great ignorance, which she combated with all her might, but it was the loose, cynical tone to which intercourse with "the crew" had habituated her that she lived in terror of disclosing in conversation.

She braced up what had become lax in her by resuscitating the remnants of the good manners and breeding she had once practised, and so it came about that she recaptured a good deal of that inner dignity of spirit which she had assumed at

the outset of her relations with Konrad. Only now it was not the mere empty acting of an affected *rôle*, but the outcome of all that her nature still possessed of nobility and refinement. Much that had recently dominated her mind became absolutely unintelligible to her, especially the tendency caught from her circle of regarding everything from an erotic point of view. Amazed, she saw, beyond the narrow sphere in which she had revolved, world after world opening, so full of glorious and beautiful things to be enjoyed that she had hardly time to bemoan and feel ashamed of the past.

It was true that when she remembered how she had been bold enough to kiss him, hot shame crept over her. She could not help being afraid that her behaviour on that occasion must ever remain a blot on his image of her. Yet there was not the slightest sign either in word or look that he did not reciprocate the reverence and esteem which she cherished for him. And this mutual respect always seemed to hang between them like a veil, obscuring the beloved one's features in a vertigo of happy fears which, however, robbed of their sting her self-reproaches for her failings.

There was to be no mention of love between them. Instead, they carried on a tender, almost shy, brother and sister comradeship. The word "friendship" was constantly occurring in their conversation; they extolled its sacred influence with grave faces without exactly understanding what they meant by it.

It was hard for her to endure his actual presence. The only caress that Konrad permitted himself from time to time was, when they were sitting together, to lay his right arm lightly on her shoulder. Though she would then have gladly drawn closer to him, she finally moved further away, unable to bear the torture of restraint. She never dared contemplate for a moment the remotest prospect of their being actually lovers. At night, when she couldn't sleep, she was content with picturing herself dozing on his shoulder; that was in itself supreme bliss enough; her imagination hardly ever strayed into forbidden preserves. It was as if her girlhood's modesty, which the sensuality of her old husband had so rudely outraged, had come back to throw a merciful shroud over her trembling soul. And all the wealth of golden thoughts and virginal sensations, the fairy-tale glamour that common things irradiated, the amusing importance of every tiny event,

the delightful expectancy of hoping for she knew not what—all this was girlish, and reminded her of long-vanished and forgotten days.

If she had but known a single human being to whom she could have confided all this happiness and folly, how glad it would have made her! This desire to tell someone became at last almost uncontrollable. More than once she had only just checked herself in time, and nearly told Richard her secrets, risking thereby a disastrous ending.

One day she plucked up heart and journeyed to the south of Berlin to tell her former landlady some of the experiences she was passing through. The old friendship between them had never quite ceased. Even if they rarely saw each other, Lilly had taken care, by sending frequent greetings and little presents, to keep herself alive in Frau Laue's affectionate remembrance.

The present "young lady" tenant of the best room opened the door to her.

Frau Laue sat as usual at the long white work-table, with her damp finger-tips tapping energetically among the heaps of pressed flowers and the paper lamp-shade lappels. She did not stop tapping when Lilly sat down beside her, and pushed the offering of sweets that she never forgot to bring in front of her.

"No, thank you, child," she said. "Every sweet I bite is a flower the less. The likes of us can only afford to eat sweets on holidays. We have no one, you see, to give us everything heart can desire and keep us like princesses. I would like to change places with you for a day, before I go down to my grave, just to see what it feels like to have nothing to do but go for walks in the morning and feed a pair of gold-fish."

"Is that your idea of happiness?" exclaimed Lilly, with a sigh.

"You are never beginning to complain of your lot!" cried Frau Laue indignantly. "If I were you I should thank the Lord every hour for having given me such a friend."

"And you think there is nothing more to wish for?" asked Lilly.

"What more can anyone want?" she scolded, still tapping. "You can't expect him to marry you now. And marriage isn't an enviable estate after anyone has gone through the



mill you have. . . . He's sure to make you a handsome allowance if you behave yourself, and you'll never suffer want to the end of your days."

"So all my hopes are to be centred, then, on a pension?" demanded Lilly.

"Well, why not?"

"I can think of other more desirable objects in life."

"What are they then, eh? Work? Just try it! See what it is to work, after living by your emotions for years. . . . Or perhaps you're thinking of taking up with another lover? You'd have a fine time of it if you did. Take my advice, child, and never do that, or you'll deserve to paste flowers like me, sixteen hours a day till you die."

And while she went on ceaselessly pasting one dried plant after another on the gummed paper, she continued to lecture and admonish Lilly severely.

Lilly got up to go with a little shiver. Here she had nothing to hope for, that was evident. She looked round her, feeling suddenly as if it was all strange to her, and said to herself, "I don't think I shall ever come here again."

The next morning the tormenting desire to unburden her heart to some sympathetic ear awoke in her more strongly than ever, and she bethought her of Frau Julia.

The clever flighty little woman had been holding aloof from the set for some time. No one seemed to know what she was doing; even her red-headed admirer had no information to give, and was shy of talking about her. Still, Lilly felt sure that the sympathy she needed would be forthcoming if she could find her out.

The smart, yellow satin little nest that the red-headed one had fitted up for her near Unter den Linden was deserted. The porter told Lilly that the "gnädige Frau" had recently moved into the suburbs, as she had become nervous of the town. Lilly smiled and asked for her address, which was written down for her on a card, and then she set out to call on Frau Julia.

In a quiet wooded neighbourhood, much patronised by poets and philosophers, she had taken up her abode in a simple-looking little villa, crammed with books and manuscripts and busts of eminent men.

She herself appeared to be greatly changed. Her dark hair,

which she had worn before in a wild frizz on her forehead, was now parted in the middle and smoothly brushed down over her ears in a prim fashion, which gave her an alarmingly virtuous air, although this particular style of coiffure happened just then to be the rage in circles where virtue for æsthetic reasons is not a valuable asset.

Though she welcomed Lilly as usual with outstretched arms, there was a want of spontaneity in her manner, and the delight that beamed from her eyes seemed rather forced, as if she were thinking of something else. Without asking Lilly how she was, or paying any attention to her looks or clothes, she poured forth an account of her own affairs.

"You'll be awfully surprised, of course," she said; "but I can't help it. I never made any secret to you of my little conscientious scruples, which, after all, were superfluous, as I was not so very bad."

"Oh really?" thought Lilly.

"And so you shall be the first of my former friends——"

"Former?" thought Lilly.

"To be told of my return to the bosom of respectability. To cut a long story short, I am about to get married."

"To your red-headed boy?" asked Lilly, pleased and sympathetic.

"Well, no, not exactly." She contemplated her fingernails with a pleased smile. "He has given his blessing, and there his rôle ends."

"Then who is your future husband?"

Frau Julia meditated a moment. "It is rather an old story," she said, hesitating. "You couldn't understand it unless you knew more of my inner life during the last year or two. Do you happen by any chance to have heard of Clarissa von Winkel, the authoress?"

Lilly remembered hazily having seen the name in certain old-fashioned and puritanical magazines for family reading, which she had glanced through for the sake of the pictures in cafés and confectioners' shops.

"Well, then, Clarissa von Winkel, who has gained quite a reputation as the champion of a sound domestic morality, as opposed to the dangerous modern ideas about free-love—that Clarissa von Winkel is myself."

Lilly was far too wrapped up in her own affairs to be able to bestow on the humour of these confessions the appreciation

they merited, though she did experience a faint glimmer of amusement as she realised what strange pranks human puppets can be made to play in life's great farce.

"Now, don't go and jump to the conclusion that I am converted, and have become a prude and a canting bigot, or anything of the kind," Frau Julia went on, with a certain dignity of tone, which became her quite as well as her former outspoken cynicism. "There's been no Damascus in my career. I have always had, as you know, two selves. One . . . ." She hesitated a moment. "I needn't tell you what it was like. . . . The other craved for propriety, and white damask table-linen. . . . That is why you always attracted me so, my dearest Lilly. I couldn't help admiring your refined loyalty. Did I not always impress on you and urge you to hold fast, no matter in what circumstance you were placed, to this loyalty, which to us women is the crown of life? Don't you remember what a point I made of it?"

Lilly could not remember, but she remembered a good many other sentiments expressed by the lady at different times scarcely in accordance with it. Her friend's new outlook on the world seemed ill adapted to give her the sympathy she had come to seek in the joyous tumult of her present feelings.

"Well, to continue my story," Frau Julia said. "Through getting my articles and stories easily accepted, especially when I submitted them to editors in person, I found myself on the road to making a nice little fortune. My red-headed boy became merely a decorative appendage. For that is where virtue scores; it pays so much better than vice if you know the right way to set about it." Then she slid her little tongue along her red lips, in her old arch manner, though her face remained immovably demure. "It was in the business of disposing of my work that I met my intended husband. I have got a divorce from the first brute at last. . . . He—this one—is the editor of a lady's paper just started, which caters for quiet domestic and housewifely tastes. It has got heaps of advertisements already. He is a man of high intellectual endowments and strictly moral principles, which, as you perceive, have not been without influence on myself."

So saying, she made a little double chin and folded her hands piously in her lap.

"And, if I may ask, how did you manage to break with your old friend?" questioned Lilly at length, almost forgetting her own trials in these extraordinary confidences.

"Break with him? . . . What are you talking about?" Julia answered suddenly, radiant again with foolish frivolity. "I couldn't be guilty of such heartlessness, and when I said just now that his *rôle* had ended, I didn't mean you to take it literally. . . . What on earth would the poor fellow do with his dyspeptic liver if I did not now and then invite him to a family dinner? In the first place, I have sworn solemnly to my future husband that my red-headed boy has never been anything more to me than a brother. Yes, we women can swear things like that, and not even blush in the process."

Lilly nodded thoughtfully. She, too, on a certain evening, would have taken any oath that had been desired of her.

"And, secondly, I tell you in confidence that he has contributed generously towards founding the new magazine. So the two are, as it were, colleagues and partners. I arranged matters thus intentionally, for I thought that it would be the best guarantee of the continuance of amicable relations all round. You needn't open your eyes so wide, my dear. Life is made up of compromises. Every bird feathers its own nest. Pray don't think I am afraid of disclosures and revelations. I shrug my shoulders at the notion of such a thing. You know tragedy is a matter of taste. I abhor it, so there's no tragedy in my philosophy. I say to myself, it's safe to smile perpetually so long as you are made of iron underneath."

Lilly felt slightly disgusted

"If it is at such a price as this," she thought, "that one purges one's life of tragedy, I would rather stick to unhappiness and leave happiness alone."

She rose to go.

However much this small creature might surpass her in strength of mind and will-power, so that she now stood with both feet firmly planted on the rock of an honourable life, she was no longer a suitable friend for Lilly.

"At all events," she said aloud, "I hope that your trust won't be misplaced."

Frau Julia waved her hand in the air.

"Bah!" she sneered. "Men are all alike. Those who know the world are devourers of women; those who don't are imbeciles. I can get on with both classes."

"There is possibly a third," Lilly put in, annoyed. She felt as if Konrad had been insulted.

"Possibly," responded Frau Julia, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I don't know it." And then, putting both hands round Lilly's waist, she said: "Tell me honestly, child; when you see me as I am now, and compare me with what I was, does it strike you that I am posing?"

"To speak the truth," Lilly confessed, "it did at first."

Frau Julia sighed. "It is difficult to grow accustomed to a dress which was not made for you. . . . Every one of us has a certain moral ambition; no one more than the so-called immoral person. But I would like to know one thing: whether my past sins or my present virtues are more to my credit."

She smiled up at Lilly, with a melancholy but mischievous face.

Lilly answered nothing. Beyond this little self-satisfied madcap she saw rising her own fate, dark and threatening as a thunder-cloud.

When she was once more in the street, her restlessness and sense of isolation took stronger possession of her than before. And yet she was thankful that she had kept silent. She knew full well that if she had submitted the portrait of her beloved to Frau Julia's acute judgment it would have been returned to her desecrated. And now she faced the fact that there was absolutely no one left in whom she could confide.

A few days later, however, in glancing, as she was in the habit of doing, through the morning paper, her eye alighted on a passage that awoke a ray of hope in her soul:

"St. Joseph's Chapel, Müllerstrasse. Vespers and Benediction" at such-and-such an hour.

Her old, long-forgotten friend and counsellor was, then, still living! He had his own church, even here in cold hard-hearted heretical Berlin. In all these years she had never entered a church. Since, acting on the advice of Fräulein von Schwertfeger, she had joined the Protestants in worship, she had regarded herself as an apostate from the true Church, and had not dared to seek solace in religion, and now she had become a regular infidel. Yet the sight of the name of St. Joseph in the paper touched a soft warm place in her heart.

Her feelings were as if, after long wanderings in foreign

lands, she had suddenly caught sight in the alien crowd of a dear long-lost home face. Now she knew to whom she might turn, without any fear of being misunderstood and sent empty away. Even if the great philosophers had demolished him a thousand times over, he was still there, ready to receive the outpourings of her poor silly overflowing heart.

Müllerstrasse lay somewhere in an extreme northerly direction ; it was in " Franz-Josef Land," the owner of a fruit and vegetable stall, of whom she made inquiries, informed her. The way led through a network of narrow streets, from one electric tram to another, past the Reichstag buildings, the Lessing Theatre, along an interminable tree-flanked road ; and beyond the Weddingplatz, which Berliners regard as the end of everywhere, the Müllerstrasse began.

No one seemed to have heard of a chapel dedicated to St. Joseph, not even people who lived in the neighbourhood. At last someone she asked said he thought there was a Catholic place up there in a yard, and after a little further exploration she found what she sought. It was a low iron building shaped like a shovel, between flowering shrubs, with high tenements surrounding it. The side door was open, and garlands of pine bid her " Welcome." She entered a plain whitewashed hall, filled with the odour of incense, laurel, and new pine-wood. In the background was an alcove decorated to resemble a starry canopy. Behind the wooden balustrade that separated the pictureless chancel from the rest of the building rose two magnificent feathery palms. The low rolling tones of an organ proceeded from the loft ; the organist had probably lingered behind after the funeral to improvise dreamily at the instrument.

Lilly's eyes wandered anxiously over the walls in quest of the shrine of her saint. She wondered if he held up his finger here in smiling warning, as did the kind old gentleman of St. Ann's in her native town.

There was no room for side altars, as every inch of space was filled with benches. But that big picture over there in tawdry gilt frame, with a console-table beneath piled with dusty nosegays, was that—— ? She started back, shocked. Her saint, her own dear beloved saint was simply absurd, with his sharp-featured, wax-doll's face, his flaxen beard and seraphically pious smile. An infant Jesus in pink sat triumphal on one arm, while in his other hand he daintily clasped a

spray of lilies. And pity succeeded her horror. How far behind her, how infinitely far away, was the time when one could worship and pray for miracles to a saint like this !

Could her good, faithful monitor in St. Ann's have been like this ? She hardly dared think of such a thing. He couldn't ; no, he couldn't have been so insipid and ridiculous. One place on earth must remain to which one's memory in hours of smiling pensive melancholy might return on holy pilgrimages. The organ began the prelude to an exquisite mass of Scarlatti's with which Lilly had been familiar in her girlhood, and so gradually she became more at home in the little chapel.

She knelt on a bench at the back, shut her eyes, and tried to fancy that instead of this flaxen-haired caricature her real old friend was looking down on her.

A saying of St. Thomas Aquinas came into her head that she had learnt in class when a child : " Other saints have been given the power by God to help us in certain circumstances, but to St. Joseph has been granted the power to help us no matter what our need may be."

Such a power he had once had in her life. So she spoke to him again for the last time across the waste of years that separated her from the altar in St. Ann's. She was sure it would be the last time, because for such childish things there could no longer be room in her soul. And as she felt it was a farewell talk, she related, without reserve, everything that had happened to her : how supremely happy she had become ; how she felt an awakening of new life within her, and her dead self blossoming forth afresh, while the whole of creation seemed one great symphony of joy. And she told him, too, of the gross deception she was forced to practise, of her fear of discovery, and of the delicious expectant tremors for which she could find no name.

Then she added that she no longer had any faith in him, and was, to all intents and purposes, an atheist. Feeling reconciled, she placed the carnations she had brought as an offering to the poor saint among the dusty nosegays, and with a lighter heart went out, laughing, to meet the spring that laughed at her.

There was not only this new-born Lilly who rode on the crest of the wave far above all earthly cares and annoyances,

but another Lilly, who every other night enchanted her old set with her triumphant humour, her *élan*, and brilliant wit, which amazed and took everyone by storm. Richard, when he came to tea in the afternoon, never ceased to wonder at the change in her. Instead of the gloomy listlessness, which had characterised her for so long, he found her sprightly and full of gay pranks, a creature of surprises, never still for a moment.

He accustomed himself readily to this new aspect of her being, though it slightly abashed him, owing to his inability to keep pace with her ; and he praised the magical effects of the new tonic, hæmatogen, which the doctor, with a knowing twinkle in his eye, had prescribed this spring instead of iron.

Every night that they went out together on pleasure bent, the same little comedy was enacted. At first she would say that she had caught cold, or had a headache, that she was not in a mood for meeting people ; but when once he had prevailed on her to come, she would play with her admirers as if they were puppies, and tell her lady friends things to their faces that filled them with nervous gratification. Sometimes, it is true, she would sit apart in sulky self-absorption, lost in dreams, though now, if anyone teased her for doing it, she neither blushed nor looked uncomfortable, but made such sharp, stinging repartees that the men retired and hid their diminished heads. Only once during this period did she drink herself into a light-headed condition, and that happened to be on the very day that she at last decided to tell Richard about her new friend. She had grappled with the question for two months. It would have to be done in the end, but indecision as to how she should do it made her put it off from day to day.

She was helped in her quandary by chance. One day Richard brought her some sketches of vases about which he wanted her opinion, and forgot to take them away with him when he left. Afterwards Konrad came across them, and with a few swift pencil-strokes inserted the outline which was in the original draft, but which the artist had omitted in developing the plan. The next day Richard was utterly astonished to find that the corrections had been made, and so accurately. Who was responsible for them ? Lilly, with recollections of her bungled glass-plaque painting, dared not say that she was, and courageously took the bull by the horns.

"My art history master made the corrections," she said.



"How long have you had an art history master?" he asked with round severe eyes.

To his surprise and consternation, she began to rate him soundly. She asked if he expected her to spend a miserable barren and frivolous existence till the end of her days. Did he think it was a crime for a woman of no occupation to try and improve her mind a little, so that she might be clever enough to talk to a sensible man like him and his associates? Surely that was better than spending all her time on gossip and finery, and going to the dogs dressed up like a frivolous doll.

The phrase, "a sensible man like you," mollified him considerably.

"It's all very well," he said in a milder tone, "but why not have told me before?"

She now began a long story.

She had seen an advertisement about six weeks ago in the *Lokal Anzeiger*, in which an erudite young scholar offered his services as coach to ladies and gentlemen with a thirst for self-improvement. She had answered it, and the scholar had come and arranged a course of lessons forthwith. It had led to a friendship between master and pupil—of a purely platonic nature, of course. She had made up her mind, she said, not to tell him, being afraid of exciting his jealousy, till she was able to convince him of the absolute disinterestedness of her intellectual endeavours by proving their success.

He knit his brow, and a sardonic smile, which she could not account for, played about his lips.

"So you have got a young scholar for a friend again?" he asked, leaning his head on one side and winking at her.

"Yes, and I am proud of it."

"I suppose he's going to be Regius professor?"

"He hasn't made up his mind what he's going to be."

"He is extremely brilliant, intellectual, and superior, I presume?"

She cast up her eyes ecstatically. "I should think so. I have never met anyone like him." She stopped short, horrified at her own indiscretion.

"Ha! ha! I see," he said, as if some long-cherished suspicion had been confirmed. "I see," and he got very red, and gnawed his moustache. "Didn't I say what it would be?"

"You are jealous!" she cried. She felt herself writhing under a shameful injustice.

Without another word he departed, scowling. An hour later a parcel from Liebert & Dehnicke's was left at the door. As she opened it, a light suit which she had seen Richard wear the summer before fell out. The note that accompanied the parcel ran as follows:

"DARLING LILLY,

"You see that I am true to my promise of coming to the assistance of your intellectual affinities with cast-off wearing apparel. I shall be happy, too, to send another supply of old boots to help them on their road to success. This will show you how jealous I am.

"Yours,

"RICHARD."

That same evening she was in such exuberant spirits that she drank wine immoderately; and never, not even when she had danced for Dr. Salmoni's delectation, had she let herself go with such unbridled abandon and exercised her art of mimicry with wilder *éclat*.

To wind up with, she danced on the top of the tables, joined together, a Salome dance which was just then the rage. She accompanied herself through her clenched teeth with quaint Eastern snatches of melody.

"What on earth is that gibberish?" the spectators asked each other.

Afterwards, when they put the question to her herself, she was incapable of giving an answer. Insensible, she heard and saw nothing more.

## CHAPTER XV

THE big railway station's grimy glass roof was pierced by the peaceful golden light of a June Sabbath morning. Beneath the three bold archways that led into the open air such masses of blue ether seemed to be concentrated that, as the trains passed under them, it was like being precipitated into a sun-drenched sea. Ribbons from girls' smart hats fluttered against the Sunday coats of their swains, each of whom appeared to think himself an indispensable master of the revels. Athletic and boating clubs were represented in the crowd, smoking clubs and music societies, and one warehouse's whole staff of clerks was there.

Through the excited holiday throng a quiet, happy pair, looking round them cautiously and keeping at a judicious distance from each other, so that it might be doubted whether they were together, made their way to a carriage in the front part of the train. Lilly walked ahead, and again and again she saw the faces of people coming towards her grow rigid with an almost solemn awe as they regarded her—a mute homage to which she was used, but which had never filled her with so much satisfaction as to-day, when she was followed by the only man in the world in whose eyes she cared to be pleasing.

In his honour she was dressed entirely in festive white, a linen coat and skirt, a soft lawn blouse, and a wide straw hat draped with a white lace veil which shaded her brow, and beneath which her burnished brown hair projected in great glossy waves. On her arm she carried a white woollen shawl as a protection against the chilly night air, for it had been agreed between them that they were not to worry about catching certain trains home, but were to stay in the country till they were tired of it.

They sat opposite each other in the corner seats of a third-class compartment, without speaking. Together they were travelling into an undiscovered land. "Trust yourself to my guidance," he had said, "and I will give you a surprise. We are going on a voyage of discovery. I am not in the least certain where the place is; if I were, it wouldn't be a voyage of discovery."

This sensation of being led like a little child was a new and exquisite joy. After an hour's journey, when the carriage had emptied, he signed to her to get out.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"Does that matter?" he rejoined.

He was right. What did it matter?

She did not even look to see what the name of the station was, and they walked out of it into the main street of a bare little country town. On the front of the yellow houses the sunlight lay like a soothing hand. The low doors of the shops were locked, and half of the poor goods displayed in the windows was covered by a sheet to show that it was Sunday. Organ-notes sounded round street corners like sighing winds. A turkey-cock came strutting consequentially from under a gateway and gobbled at them; and then there were no more organ-notes . . .

Houses were gradually left behind. A whiff of ripening grain came from the fields, but the pungent fragrance of the yellow lupins outscented it. All round them were meadows carpeted with white and pink tufts of clover, and, beyond, dark firs rose on the slopes of sandy hills.

The road was shadeless, but they tramped along it gaily, and little columns of silvery dust whirled in front of them. He knew everything, and nothing escaped his keenly observant eye. He pointed out a wild rabbit flicking the white underpart of its tail impertinently as it scampered away with comical self-importance. Every moment there was something fresh to look at.

Since her married days at Lischnitz Castle, Lilly had never seen the spring blossom forth in the pure open country.

"Ah! if then I had had him for my guide," she thought, "all would have been different."

As they entered the warm shade of the pine-woods, a squirrel ran almost over their feet and darted a few feet up

a tree, where it paused and sat motionless, as if turned to stone.

They looked at each other, both thinking of the moment that had first brought them together.

Lilly went close up to the little animal, but he did not stir.

"I feel as if I were on enchanted ground," she said; "if he began to talk to us I shouldn't be surprised."

She threw herself down, with a sigh of content, on the grey cushiony moss.

He followed her example. Shading their eyes with their hands, they lay on their backs and blinked at the sunshine flickering down on them through the branches. They had nearly forgotten the squirrel, when suddenly, close above them, he made a whistling sound, and then scuttled for his life further up the tree to the topmost branches.

The scared little fellow had been staring at them all the time, not daring to move until now.

"Do you see?" Konrad said. "As long as our human language sounds in their ears, they'll take care to have nothing to do with us."

"All the same, we are bewitched here," she said, laughing. "I've never before lain so luxuriously on the moss and had the sun shine on me so; have you?"

"Yes, once," he answered. "I remember it quite well."

"When did you, and where?" she demanded instantly, jealous of any moment of happiness in his life that she had not created for him.

"Oh, there's not much to tell about it," he said. "It was at Ravello, perched like a gull's nest high up on the rocks above the sea, not far from Amalfi—just about there is a fairy-land of magic country. Picture old Moorish palaces half deserted and half lived in; marble courtyards shut in by trellises; ruined fountains, with myrtle and laurel growing in profusion, and little white climbing-roses trailing over every nook and cranny. There was one place I would have given anything to get inside . . . It was a small mysterious gallery standing out against the deep blue sky like a web of silver filigree. So once when there was no one about—only a handful of olive-gatherers live in the neighbourhood—I behaved like a schoolboy, and climbed the great iron

gate as high as a house, bar by bar, up one side and down on the other."

"Oh, how splendid!" cried Lilly.

"Yes. I got inside. And when I had examined all the gorgeous details with a professional eye, I threw myself full length on the warm stone steps, and let the sun bake me through; just in the same position as we are lying in here now under these Brandenburg pines. And—would you believe it?—the little bluish-green lizards that you are so fond of came and slowly and cautiously crawled all over me."

"Oh, how heavenly!" cried Lilly in rapture.

"And while I lay there, with the old marble fountain making music in my ears, I fell fast asleep. But I had better have left going to sleep alone, because there's a risk of getting sun-stroke even in mid-winter. I should in all probability have been a victim, if some tourists hadn't come and thrown sticks and stones at me. Everything looked red and swam before my eyes. To climb back over the gate was out of the question. The key had to be fetched from the Sindaco, and subsequently I had to appear before him and give an account of myself. But, thank goodness, they didn't lock me up for trespassing, because all the witnesses tapped their foreheads and said '*è matto*'—'he's mad.'"

"Never mind," she laughed. "You at least got your way, and saw the inside of the forbidden garden. Many people have to be satisfied with standing outside and looking through the railings."

"That's a pleasure that may be ours to-day," he remarked. And she had to restrain her curiosity.

"It doesn't hurt, at any rate," he went on, "to practise now and then standing outside. For God knows that generally the happiness we happen to be craning our necks to reach is a forbidden garden."

Lilly gazed at him in alarm. What did he mean by that? Then their eyes met in shy understanding. The disquieting expectancy to which she was afraid to give a name crept over her suddenly like an ague.

"Let us go on," she said, springing to her feet, and she walked on rapidly without looking round to see if he followed.

The woods grew clearer. They came to a little swampy coppice where silver birches shot up their slender trunks gaily from mossy pedestals.

The hot midday air stirred in tiny wavelets. Somewhere not far off church-bells were ringing, but no farmstead was in sight, and suddenly they found themselves at diverging paths without knowing which direction to take.

"A decision is called for," he said, and strained his ears for a moment in the quarter whence the sound of church-bells came.

"I wish with all my heart," he added, "that there was a bell ringing thus to guide me on my road in life." And he turned to the right.

Then he told her that he was standing figuratively at cross-roads. He had been offered a post which, considering how young he was, ought not to be scoffed at; but before accepting he was bound to consider whether it would interfere with the progress of his life's work.

"It's a very good post, I suppose?" Lilly asked proudly. If he had been appointed minister of the fine arts or Emperor of China she would not have thought it in the least extraordinary. But he seemed disinclined to say more.

"I would rather talk to you about it when it's settled one way or the other," he replied. And she was perforce satisfied.

Red-tiled roofs appeared above the bushes, and the mirror-like surface of a lake made a shining line against the horizon.

"Is that where we're going?" asked Lilly.

"It may be," he answered.

"Oh, don't be so mysterious," she scolded him in fun. "I've been very good in not asking questions. But now I really must insist on your telling me what your programme is."

"Yes, when we've got there," he laughed. "I know you, and don't want to make you jealous before the right moment."

Could it be that there was another woman in the case?

Another woman? She did not betray her emotion, but as they walked on she felt quite faint—partly from hunger and partly from mental distress. The lake now lay before them in its early summer beauty, with its greenish-grey girdle of reeds and rushes, and lights and shadows flitting across it.

A little distance from the bank, on a shrubby slope, was the inn, with "Logierhotel" printed on its signboard. It was one of those orange-brick monstrosities built in the barbarous

palatial-barn style. But round it three or four ancient lime-trees spread their wide shady branches, and they seated themselves on a white bench beneath them, their mood harmonising with the scene.

To their left the lake stretched away into the hazy distance ; on their right, beyond the reeds and sedges of the shore, was a tiny village with moss-green thatched roofs, and a stumpy, storm-beaten spire half hidden among reeds and bushes. And close to them, not a hundred steps from where they sat in the shade of the limes, there rose the wooded slopes and mighty tree-tops of an ancestral park, from the interior of which they caught the gleam of pillars, bridges, and white, vine-clad balustrades. Very likely that was the forbidden garden, outside the gates of which they were to stand to-day. How charming ! how mysterious !

Anglers came up from the lake, scarlet of face and panting with thirst, and these apparently were the only guests at the inn besides themselves, for the Sunday stream of excursionists had not yet begun to flow in the direction of this quiet nook.

The bill of fare which the landlady, equipped with all the wiles she had acquired in the capital, smilingly handed to them presented a dazzling abundance of good things. It was too bad that they all came together. Lilly was asked to choose, but declined. Thoughts of the strange woman who was certainly in the case depressed her. And she only saw the laughing world, which threw its early summer gifts at their feet so bountifully, through a mist of suppressed tears.

" Here we are at last," she said, sighing. " So you may as well confess : what sort of woman is she ? "

He laughed heartily. " So you've guessed, have you, that it is a woman ? "

" If not, why should I be jealous ? "

" I must admit you have every cause. I never set eyes on anything more beautiful ; the only pity is, that she is marble."

Oh ! then that's all it was !

" I am and always shall be a silly," she said, laughing from relief, and he kissed her hand in contrition.

While they were waiting for the fish which they had ordered, he told her the story of how they came to be making their present pilgrimage.



He had one day, during his sojourn in Rome, seen in the window of an art-dealer's shop the antique cast of a woman's head, much damaged, but of such inspiring and sombre beauty that he went again and again day after day to feast his eyes upon it. And one morning he found the owner of the shop and a German gentleman standing in the doorway engaged in a lively conversation, which, however, did not progress, as neither of them understood what the other was talking about. He offered his services as interpreter, and to his chagrin learned that the subject of discussion was his favourite bust, which the German, a courteous and cultivated country gentleman, wished to purchase. Setting aside his own feelings, Konrad assisted in concluding the bargain on the Baron's behalf, and had received an invitation from him to visit his house on returning to Germany, in order that he might see the marble bust adorning his park, and convince himself that its new surroundings were not unworthy of its beauty.

"Oh! so the garden isn't forbidden after all?" cried Lilly, holding out her arms ecstatically towards the green mysterious barriers. "We may just walk straight in."

Konrad's face became thoughtful. "It's not so simple as that," he said, "for how should I introduce you? You are not my wife. . . . Only between ourselves you are my sister, and we are too young to trump up any other plausible relationship."

A sudden bitterness welled up within her. Once more she felt despised and rejected, ostracised from honourable society.

"You should have left me at home," she broke out. "I am only an encumbrance to you."

"Ah, Lilly," he said, "what do I really care about marble busts? I would rather stand behind the fence with you than have the run of the whole park without you."

She caressed his hand, as it hung by his side, mollified and grateful. And then at last the carp came.

Two hours later they were pacing along a seemingly endless wall, half as high again as a man, with no break in it to peep through. Not till they came to the corner of the park where the wall ended did they find a less impenetrable, high, moss-grown fence, which ran along to the right. Now through the gaps they could get a view of the interior. Venerable plane-

branches formed arches over shady nooks, with groups of oaks and limes between. The open grassy lawns were banked with rhododendrons, the blossoms of which looked like violet eyes. On a knoll in the background, a little round temple with Tuscan columns and a shining green roof looked solemnly out of its dark surrounding cypresses.

"She must be in there," Konrad said. But the little temple was empty, so they prosecuted their search further afield. Not a single opening in the foliage escaped their vigilance. Here and there statues gleamed, a Ceres, a Satyr playing on his flute, and in a cypress thicket they caught a glimpse of a shrine of the Virgin, but nowhere did they see a sign of the strange, beautiful woman's head they were looking for.

They went on. A stream ran out from the park across the road, spanned by a rough plank such as is to be met with in any country lane. But a hundred paces away, inside the park, was another snow-white glistening bridge, throwing its graceful arch boldly over the water.

"The Venetian bridges are like that," he said.

"Across such a bridge the gods entered Walhalla," she sighed.

They stood still and conjured up the joy of crossing that bridge. But still they could not get on the track of the marble bust.

Beyond the plank bridge, where the village began, the park receded some way from the lane. A row of Weymouth pines flanked the inner side of the fence. The quaint village street was gay with Sunday festivities. Dancing was going on to the accompaniment of piano and fiddles, and somewhere bowls were rolling merrily; but they passed without taking any notice of these things, for all their interest was still centred on the forbidden garden. Every moment it drew them with more compelling charms. Crumbling gate-posts were half-hidden among the village lime-trees, and the palings were so rotten they hardly held together. At this spot the foliage on the inner side was quite impenetrable to the eye. Trunk was garlanded to trunk by growths of clematis and ivy, and lilac and spiræa bushes were massed underneath. It looked as if the master of the garden had, in addition to a stone wall, drawn a living one around his demesne to hedge in himself and his family in happy seclusion.

For a long time they walked on without being rewarded by another glimpse of the inside of the park. Then unexpectedly they came to an old three-cornered gateway which, with its vases and pillars, its cracked belfry and lacework of latticed railings, was half buried in blossoming acacias.

Here at last they got an uninterrupted view of the inside of the park. A straight avenue of pines led in solemn dignity up to the castle, but even at this favourable standpoint nothing of its architecture was revealed to their gaze. Trees and bushes hid it from view. The only bit of stone-work their eager eyes discerned was a flight of steps on the columns of which marble nymphs raised aloft their snow-white wings.

"Isn't that lovely?" Lilly murmured with a sigh; and thrusting her face through the iron bars, she whimpered and begged playfully to be let in.

"That is exactly how I stood, outside the gate at Ravello," he said. "Now you know what it is like."

As he said this, it struck her that the sensation of being shut out somewhere was familiar to her too. She knew as well as he did what it was like. But where was it that cold iron had pressed her cheeks before?

Ah! now she recollected. Had she not many a time stood without the latticed door which barred the staircase to the private part of Liebert & Dehnicke's warehouse? That pretentious, proud, forbidding laurel-flanked ascent, which her unholy feet might never tread?

It, too, was a forbidden garden. Forbidden gardens abounded everywhere, it seemed!

"I think we had better give it up," she said softly; "it only makes our hearts ache."

So hand-in-hand they wandered back along the path they had come, close to the fence, and talked persistently of other things. And yet their eyes still lingered longingly in the neighbourhood of the park, and the aspiration they both felt, but did not express for fear of hunting reproaches, gilded everything with a fairy-tale glamour.

Evening came. Violet mists hung over the meadows, and the copper-coloured trunks of the pines glowed like torches. The deeper the setting sun sank into the reeds and rushes, the more the lake lost its cool, blue, silvery sheen, and took on a

network of ruddy gold. It looked now as if it bore on its face the sparkling fulfilment of all earthly promises.

Neither of them could tolerate being on shore any longer.

A boat lay at anchor by the hotel's bathing pavilion, where in the cool of the evening happy bathers were splashing, and they hired it for a mere song. Konrad took the oars and Lilly seated herself at the stern. All kinds of water-flowers rose with a swish lightly to the surface as the boat cut through a carpet of sedges. Mingled with the young green of the sprouting reeds were the brown battered remnants of last year's growth; stately bulrushes bordered the banks, and the water flag planted her golden tents between them. Like huge dense walls of purple, the park's wealth of timber rose high against the sky.

When Lilly pointed this out, Konrad shook his head and said: "It's no good thinking any more about it." But, nevertheless, he kept casting glances in that direction.

Lilly had scarcely ever been in a boat, and soon gave up steering as a bad job. She spread her shawl at the bottom of the boat and made herself a comfortable soft nest, into which she retired.

Crouched at Konrad's feet, she lay there with her back against the seat in the stern. And thus, her eyes dreamily fixed on blue space, she began to build castles in the air about her future, devising plans by which, with a bound, she was to swing herself back into the midst of respectability.

She would give music lessons—she was good enough for beginners—and with the proceeds prepare herself for the stage, for which she had a decided talent. . . . Or perhaps it would be wiser to go in for science, to train her mind so that it might not lag behind his. She must be intellectual enough to deserve his friendship so long as he desired her to be his friend. Or—so that no harm should happen to anyone else—she would go abroad and teach German, and come back a new and regenerated woman at his summons. Or . . . Ah! what? Or . . . or . . . lie and dream, and drain the happiness of the hour to the dregs. Exposure and death—one must entail the other—would come time enough. . . .

The sun went down, melting into a blood-red haze. Nearness and distance were now veiled in violet mists. The whole globe seemed to be diluted into light and air, the reeds alone,

with their slender black stems latticing the evening after-glow, retained an earthly corporeal form.

The foliage of the park gradually melted into a dark undefined mass. More than ever did it now seem to be a forbidden garden, filled with thrills and mysteries, sinking for ever into the unattainable.

As the boat glided along the edge of the reeds, it suddenly drifted near a blue bay, which cut like a wedge into the land on the park side, so far in that it was impossible to see where it ended. For a moment Konrad rested on his oars motionless, then he sprang to his feet with a cry of delight.

"What is it?" she asked.

"You remember we saw a stream flowing out of the park on the village side?"

"Of course I do."

"It must have flowed in somewhere, mustn't it?"

"Why, yes."

He pointed with his hand to the gleaming bay's narrowing tip.

"There's the place!"

"And do you really think that at last we have . . ."

She dared not suggest it.

"If we like, we can in this boat traverse the whole unexplored region by water."

In her childlike jubilation she jumped up with an exclamation, and simply fell on his neck as if it was a natural thing to do, and they had never made any platonic vows.

Slowly the boat drifted on with the current—between meadows lined with weeping willows, where the evening mist hung like white scarves. Peasants' cottages stood near, with fishing-nets spread out over the fences. Then, at a bend in the stream, a dark gateway of foliage opened like a huge vault in front of them.

"Oh, goodness!" cried Lilly.

"Hush!" he whispered, in pretended awe. "Now we must be as quiet as mice, or we shall get turned out for trespassing, after all."

And the dip of his oars became so stealthy that it might have been taken for the splash of a leaping fish.

Thus they rowed under the triumphal arch of leaves which thickly interlaced overhead. It was pitch dark close around them, though here and there from the right bank came an

occasional gleam of summer twilight. Lamplights, too, twinkled in the distance, and they could catch the hum of voices, the clink of glasses, and now and then a stray chord struck on the piano. The foliage parted, and an unimpeded view of the castle lay before them. It was a wide, two-storeyed, box-like structure, its ponderous simplicity dating from a period when the grandees of Brandenburg still possessed little sense of the artistic. But on the stone steps gleamed the marble nymphs that had greeted them in the afternoon, and beyond their white bodies one saw on the terrace itself a long table, round which was gathered, in the flickering lamplight, a chattering, laughing party, passing gaily with song and wine the intoxicating summer evening.

"And he might be sitting there too," thought Lilly, "if I were not hanging like a millstone about his neck," and she felt almost as if she must apologise to him.

They drifted quickly by on the current, and like the vision of a moment the banquet vanished from their sight. They passed the brightly lighted windows of the castle kitchen and offices, where servants flitted to and fro like ministering spirits, and glided again into silence and darkness. To their right, at the back of the house with its countless windows, was a grass plot bordered with old statues and ivy-draped urns; on their left everything was plunged in shadow. Here was an avenue of century-old limes running along the bank of the stream, every ray of light extinguished in its dark depths.

Maybe somewhere near here stood the marble head they longed to find. Lilly's eyes searched every corner furtively, as if she scrupled to deprive him of the joy of discovery.

The arched bridge, which they had admired earlier in the day, now gleamed at them again out of the dusk. It evidently did not lead to Walhalla, but to an islet of spiræa and hemp bushes, under the branches of which a pair of swans were roosting. At the sound of the oars they awoke, and with flapping wings pursued the boat, opening their beaks for bread.

"Swans! the one touch that was wanted to make everything perfect!" Lilly exclaimed jubilantly. "I wish I had some crumbs to give them."

She turned her head to look after the swans, and her neck rested against his knees.

" May I stay like this ? " she asked a little nervously.

" Yes, if it's comfortable," he answered ; and there was a caressing yielding in his tone that sent a warm glow through her limbs.

She took off her hat, not to crush it, and laid it on the seat in the stern. Now her head was free to lean too against him lightly, and in sweet anxiety she felt his hand rest for a moment tenderly on her hair. Yet he was silent and preoccupied, as if some burden were weighing on his mind, which he could not throw off. And again she felt as she had often felt before, as if a veil hung between him and herself—a veil that seldom lifted, and obscured from her the true characteristics of his nature, much as she clung to him in loving intimacy.

Oh, if only he would be merry !

The park came to an end, and the red after-glow, no longer hidden by walls of foliage, flamed in full glory over them. The spell threatened to be broken. The world of magic became almost ordinary.

" Come, let us turn round," she begged softly.

And they turned the boat's head and rowed again into the dreamy bliss of semi-darkness.

But now he had to strike out with a will, because they were rowing against the current, and he could not prevent his oars from splashing audibly in the water.

" We shan't get off. They will catch us now ! " he said.

" Oh, but they are far too happy," she replied, " to be down on other happy people."

" Yes, it looks almost like an enchanted castle ; but—who knows ?—it may be a snare and a delusion."

" Why should it be ? "

" Ah, God knows ! . . . Bleeding wounds can be hidden under flowers, and the beauty with which a man may surround himself is often deceptive."

This scepticism displeased her.

" They must be happy ! " she cried ; " they who have given us so much to-day must have enough for themselves too."

" It doesn't follow, darling," he answered. " It's possible to make a rich man of a beggar, and to be as poor as a church mouse one's self."

" Are we beggars, then ? " she asked, raising herself gently up to him.

"No, by Jove! we are not beggars;" and he drew a deep breath.

There was a silence, and then it seemed as if something warm and damp was falling on her forehead.

He was actually crying—crying for joy!

Did she deserve it? She, Lilly Czepanek, who . . . And to hide her own tears she withdrew into herself. It was more than she could bear. She would have liked to sob and cry and kiss his hands, but instead she was obliged to clench her hands, and stuff her gloves between her teeth so that he should not notice her agitation. It was like an intervention of Providence that, as they once more drifted close by the castle, the sound of a woman's voice singing should fall on their ears.

What was the song? Ah! out of "Tristan." She had never heard it in the theatre, but she was sure it could be nothing but "Tristan."

She raised her head interrogatively, and Konrad, stooping, whispered in her ear, "Isolde's 'Liebestod.'" He quickly ran the boat ashore at the darkest spot on the bank, for not a note must be lost. On the terrace above, laughter and chatter were silenced. Only the nightingale in the lime-boughs was undisturbed, and mingled its sweet rhapsody with the exultant death-agony of the woman who, more than any other creation of God or man, teaches us that the will not to be is the most triumphant manifestation of being.

Lilly trembled from head to foot. She stretched her hands behind her to reach his. She could not help holding on to him. If she had not held on to him she must have sunk into space. Not till she felt his warm fingers between hers did she become calmer.

The last note died away; the grand arpeggios of the *Nachspiel* melted into silence. There was no clapping or applause of any kind. That lively party up there on the terrace were evidently impressed, and realised what was due to the singer.

Konrad, with a silent pressure, let go her hands and went back to the oars. She did not demur. The forbidden garden vanished, vanished utterly.

The dusk of early night now lay on the meadows. Not a sound was to be heard far or near. Yet the world seemed to echo with the melody of harp and the sound of song.



"And we've never seen your marble beauty," murmured Lilly, stroking his knees. "Yet I keep thinking that was *her* voice."

"And I, too," he burst out passionately. "She wasn't singing for those good people up there at all, but for us—for us alone."

"Ah! I wish I could sing it like her!"

"Try, at any rate."

She sang a few passages here and there. But she could not connect them, and, what was more, something else rose and forced its way imperiously into her memory.

With that grandest and most exquisite inspiration of the great master mingled, unbidden, her own poor "Song of Songs." And she sang out into the profound silence:

"Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside . . ."

She paused.

"What is that?" he asked. "I don't know it at all."

"That is my 'Song of Songs,'" she replied, drawing a deep breath.

Never before had she mentioned its name to a living soul.

"Your 'Song of Songs'?" he asked in astonishment.

And what lay before her was as clear as daylight; she would perhaps never have such a chance again. This was the moment to lay bare the secret of her youth to him.

"Put down the oars and listen. I am going to confide something to you. You may think it quite silly and ridiculous, but to me it has always been sacred."

Speechless, he shipped his oars.

"You must come and sit beside me, so that I can see your face."

His eye swept the water with a searching glance. The boat was again drifting serenely on the mirror-like bosom of the lake, which seemed to have gathered on its ripples all the throbbing blue and purple shadows of the summer night. There was not the slightest sign of danger ahead, so he obediently did as she wished.

They crouched close together at the bottom of the little craft, with their heads propped against the seat that Konrad had occupied for so long, and she told her story. She related

how the legacy her poor runaway father had left behind exercised a powerful influence on her at all periods in her life. . . . If the years of her girlhood had been full of it, later it even attained a higher and more mysterious significance. It became, as it were, a symbol of all her efforts and actions. When her life became a whirl of useless frivolity then it was silent—sometimes for years together—but whenever her soul had an uplifting, whenever her pursuits and ideals accorded, then it came to life again. It outsang all that was low and unlovely in the world. From disgrace and wickedness outwardly it had not been able to protect her altogether, but it had at least kept her free within, and susceptible to the advent of one for whom she had unconsciously waited. And now that this one of all others had really come, she felt that the hour of fulfilment, both for herself and for her "Song of Songs," had sounded. Now it seemed that it must go forth into all the world to touch and conquer every heart and to bring its creator and herself glory and redemption.

So she talked herself into such a state of exalted enthusiasm that she became unmindful of time and place, and everything but the one thought that she still had more of what was best and purest within her to lay at his feet. But she had said as much as she could say, more than she could ever have believed she would confide to any human being, more than till this hour she had known of herself. He now held her noblest, truest self in the hollow of his hand, to do with it what he listed. All that was lax and impure, all that had brought ruin into her heart and life, was gone. She need no longer trouble herself about it.

While she had been telling him this wonderful tale, she would have liked to see what effect it had upon him, but had not trusted herself to glance at his face. Now, however, that it was finished, she ventured to turn in his direction, and became aware that his eye rested on her with a curiously confused and wild expression, such as she had never noticed in him before; for, as a rule, he kept his emotions at a distance with, as it were, fisticuffs. Her heart began to beat loudly, and the unrest of expectation to which she could give no name became so strong that she nearly ran to the other end of the boat to control it and prevent herself suffocating.

Then she saw him shut his eyes and throw his head back against the sharp edge of the seat. "You will hurt yourself,"

she whispered ; and, instead of fleeing from him as she wanted to do, she placed her arm to serve as a cushion between his neck and the seat.

Now he lay on her breast and breathed heavily.

" Shall I sing you some more out of it ? " she asked, bending over him tenderly.

" Yes, yes, please," he murmured.

And she sang, in a half-coaxing voice, as if she were singing lullabies, all those arias which, since the day her poor mother's mind had sunk into eternal night, had never been heard by any human ear. " The lily of the valleys " and " The rose of Sharon " she sang, and that other lyric in which all the sounds and magic of spring were mingled :

" For, lo, the winter is past . . . the flowers appear  
on the earth . . . and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land "

So she went on singing, more and more. When she sometimes paused and asked if he had heard enough, he only shook his head and pressed closer to his soft pillow.

Once she glanced round and saw that they were moored in the reeds, and that it was now completely night. But why should she mind that ? Somehow or other they would manage to get home.

She was drawing to the end. There were only " Set me as a seal upon thine heart," " How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter," to come ; and, above all, the verse which began with words so singularly appropriate to this day's adventures : " Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field." But when she came to the lines :

" Let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender  
grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth : there will  
I give thee . . . "

her breath failed her and she could not go on.

" Why have you stopped singing ? " she heard him ask.

There was a buzzing of bees and a ringing of bells in her ears.

" Be brave ! " a voice shouted within her ; " be brave, or you will lose him for ever."

But at that moment she felt two trembling lips seeking hers, and then it was all over with thoughts of being brave.

Midnight was long past when the boat at last put in to the shore. The bathing pavilion was dark and deserted, but in the hotel lights still glimmered.

In extreme trepidation they rang the bell.

"There's always a room ready here for belated young married couples," said the deferential, smiling landlady reassuringly.

## CHAPTER XVI

**I**t would be incorrect to say that no lucky star shone on Lilly's love at this stage of its development. In the first place, Adele proved, in her born uncommunicativeness and passionate partiality for the handsome "friend" of her mistress, a valuable ally. Secondly, Richard, who on the memorable Sunday had been obliged to go off and join his mother at Harzburg, remained away not for a day only, but for a whole week; thirdly, when he visited her on his return, he was so full of his own affairs that he had no eyes for her guiltily embarrassed reception of him.

He affected a lofty and superior air, the nasal drawl of his cavalry-officer days, and wore a monocle dangling over his navy-blue silk waistcoat. Judging from which, and such symptoms as his head inclining to an extreme angle on his left shoulder and his eyes blinking slyly, it might have been gathered that instead of joining his mother dutifully, he too had been on a spree *à deux* in the country on his own account.

This, however, proved an erroneous supposition. He had not only been actually at Harzburg till the evening before, but he had to go back there at once for a longer stay—for a month, at least.

"What's the matter with you?" he exclaimed; for Lilly, in a seventh heaven of delight at the news, fell back in her chair almost swooning.

It was true that she immediately scrambled up again and would not own to anything unusual in her behaviour; but he insisted on piling cushions at her back, and would not allow her to risk the exertion of pouring out tea for him. His every act was eloquent of a guilty conscience.

"A summer holiday together is out of the question for us," he said, trying to return to his lofty manner. "And not only that, we have become much too dependent on each other."

It will be well for both of us to go our own gait for a bit, and best for all parties concerned. In fact, it's absolutely necessary in view of coming circumstances."

This speech sounded as familiar to Lilly as an old tune in music. She knew exactly what was coming.

"Confess," she said, smiling. "What's on the cards now?"

And then he came out with it, stuttering and drawling out his words. An American, born of German parents, with millions of dollars, of irreproachable style, extremely *chic*, approved by his mother, and her own parents not averse, and she herself to all appearances agreeable. If he didn't do it now, he never would.

"I congratulate you," Lilly said, tapping his hand playfully.

He stared at her with astonished and somewhat reproachful eyes.

"Is that all you've got to say to it?" he asked.

"What else should I say?"

"You can take it so coolly? Are you so utterly without feeling that the thought of parting from your old friend doesn't affect you in the least? I thought you were a little more womanly and sympathetic; I must say I did."

"Please recollect," she said, "that every time that you have talked of marrying you have made the same reproach when I have said I have no desire to stand in your way. You talk as if it was *I* who was showing *you* the door, instead of its being the other way about."

Then he flared up. "What expressions you use! How can you possibly tell what I am going through—the wrestling and struggles I have with myself? How many nights do you think I haven't slept a wink for wondering what is to become of you? But you go on as if it had nothing on earth to do with you. You are, in fact as frivolous and heartless as you can be; so now you know my opinion of you."

At his words, delightful visions of her freedom danced before her eyes, glowing nights given up to uninterrupted love, days of sweet anticipatory dreams. Anything that might happen afterwards seemed as far off as the end of the world. She listened to the rest of his harangue with an absent, indulgent smile.

"If *you* don't see there's anything to worry about in your future," he wound up, "that's all the more reason why I

should take it into consideration. I have to provide for you, and mamma agrees that it's my duty."

The word "mamma" made her pull herself together.

Since the terrible scene in the counting-house, her name by mutual consent had been left out of their conversations. They had substituted for it evasions which each had understood and appreciated in the other.

Now, without warning, "mamma," the symbol as it were of all that was disgraceful and degrading in her existence, flamed before her eyes.

"Any scheme that *she* has a finger in," Lilly cried, "must humiliate me to the dust. I tell you both straight that you had better be careful. If you make any proposals to me about an allowance of money, I shall consider it a bitter insult and never forgive you."

He paced the room, wringing his hands. "There you are, talking nonsense again! Don't you see that the world would cry shame on me if I turned you off with nothing? And, apart from that, what do you think would become of you? . . . You'd be on the streets. Woman, do you realise that?"

With sublime indifference, she ignored both him and his heroic zeal on her behalf.

"I can think of other ways," she said, half to herself.

Before her rose a life full of struggle and strenuous triumphs, a tossing hither and thither through storms and hardships, and a jubilant victory as she entered at his side into the society of those who were as good and steadfast as *he* was. But that final consummation could only come later—much, much later.

Richard interpreted her differently. His eyes were fixed on her suspiciously. He paused in front of her and asked, with a slight shudder, "I say, are you going . . . to act like a fool and injure yourself?"

She burst out laughing. Already he evidently pictured her beautiful corpse being dragged out of the water and laid out

"No, I am not going to commit suicide . . . at least, certainly not on your account; and, if I wanted to, I would manage it with such good taste that you would not be inconvenienced or have anything to reproach yourself with."

"You can't mean that you think you'll marry!" he rejoined, still unconvinced. "What decent fellow would marry you after you've lived with me for four years?"

"There are other ways," Lilly repeated obstinately.

He seemed relieved, but went on: "I don't half like leaving you here to mope alone. You'll get depressed, and then you'll be nasty to me. What do you say to having a little change somewhere? You might go to Ahlbeck or Screiberhau, or some strait-laced place like that."

Only by a slight quiver of the eyelids did she betray the scornful laughter that convulsed her inwardly.

"You know I hate making acquaintances," she answered lightly; "and in the midst of people who don't want me I feel doubly alone."

He relapsed into frowning meditation.

"Well, then," he hesitated, and drawled out his words as people do who are afraid of their own boldness, "then . . . perhaps the best thing would be for you to come . . . somewhere near."

"Near where?"

"Don't pretend you don't know what I mean."

"I do know, but I can hardly believe my ears."

"What is there so wonderful in it?" he growled. "I could look after you sometimes, and have a chat about one thing and another."

"And show me her, I suppose, to get my opinion and my blessing?"

"Well, what if I did? You and I have consulted each other about everything we have done for years. . . . I cannot for the life of me see why it should be so monstrous in this case."

She felt something of patronising pity for him. She patted his hand and said:

"I don't think, my dear boy, that I am quite the right person to assist in your courtship."

"Good Lord! What next? You talk quite theatrically to-day. You are evidently suffering from swelled head. Yes, swelled head, I say! You are trying to get a rise out of me, and I don't like it, just now especially."

She laughed and stretched herself. How petty it all was, and how ridiculous! How little she cared! And why should she care?

Alone—to be alone with him. That was the only thing that mattered in the whole world.

"You would rather not, then?"



She silently shook her head.

"Very well," he said, and looked as if he were going to leave her in anger; but he hadn't the strength of mind.

"Lilly."

"Yes?"

"I should like to prevent any future misunderstandings between us. You seem to think that, this time too, it's all a joke."

"Not at all, Richard. I wish you every happiness. Only, with the best intentions, I cannot be of much use to you in this matter."

"Of use to me! Who was saying anything about your being of use to me? Mamma is right! She says if I don't pull it off this time I never shall. So, understand once for all, in a few weeks I will be over between us."

She nearly said, "So much the better"; but seeing that there were tears in the corners of his eyes she refrained, for she didn't wish to hurt him.

Four years of life spent together lay behind them. He was so dependent on her for sympathy that she could not let him go without a word of advice and encouragement. She spoke to him as if he were a child, said that his mother was right, praised his scheme, and enumerated the many good reasons why it ought to come about; and in order to put his mind at ease with regard to her own complacent attitude, she reminded him that it had always been her highest ambition that he should feel free to do as he liked. She also assured him that to the end of her life she would retain her sentiments of friendship towards him. And in the end they both shed tears at parting.

## CHAPTER XVII

NOW the way was clear, now the new life might be consecrated with rejoicing and thanksgiving. July came and scorched the deserted streets. Those who remained in the aristocratic West-end, with no employer to ply the lash, spent dreamy days behind closed shutters, and wandered between bedroom and bath.

Lilly did not come to life till evening, when the town breathed out the heat that it had absorbed during the day in a redhot glow, when dusty clouds rolled over the yellow surface of the canal, and behind the parched and prematurely faded chestnuts the red furnace of the sky melted into the reflected lights of the street-lamps.

Then at Konrad's side she strolled through the blue twilight of the streets, using her eyes so as to escape observation from acquaintances who might chance to be about.

They met worthy, middle-class families on their way to the gardens. Lovers joined each other at appointed street corners. And between these two extremes was the floating element of those detached beings who are alone and solitary in crowds, and who yearn to steal from laughing Chance what they have prayed for in vain from sterner gods. A sultry vapour of secret desires hung over the exhausted city, in which conventional reserve and genuine sentiment flickered up and were extinguished as if they had never been.

How long ago seemed the days when she herself had sauntered around, hoping for fate to come her way, yet not daring to compel it. And, with a shudder at the thought of the dangers she had escaped, she clung closer to Konrad's protecting arm.

They always succeeded in finding some private nook after their own heart to dine in, where a gipsy band scraped their fiddles wildly, or Tyrolese played their zithers, or the landlord

himself, a musician who had known better days, acted as conductor of an orchestra. In ivy-clad arbours, where the hot breeze stirred the dust on the evergreens in tubs, they could pass the evening hours together without fear of discovery. In the meantime a change had come over their intercourse. There were still instructive and erudite harangues on every conceivable subject, and listening attentively she hung on his lips with as much eagerness as ever, but her holy zeal for scientific studies had evaporated.

That God did not exist, that Fra Filippo Lippi was a scoundrel, that a line gone mad should be consigned to an asylum even if it was modern of the modern, that baroque art had its redeeming qualities—all this and much else that was interesting Lilly had heard many times, but it no longer provoked argument.

Often they looked long and silently into each other's eyes with a tender smile of yearning, as if that were the most eloquent language in which they could converse. Often too his thoughts wandered away on their own solitary excursions, and only came back to her under coercion. Then she was sad and jealous, and begged to go home.

Not till he was pillowed in her arms, lying close to her heart, was she content. The heat of the day had baked the walls through. The curtains were oppressive, and through the blinds a kind of desert cyclone blew ; but they took no notice, the sultriness suited their mood.

They dreaded falling asleep as a misfortune, which shamefully abbreviated the hours of their being together, and so they promised that the one who kept awake longer was to rouse the other.

It was she who always kept awake longer ; for he was exhausted by the day's work. For him there was no prospect of another doze after breakfast in bed, or of a siesta on the couch as alleviation from the midday heat. And as he lay with tired limbs outstretched, twitching like a noble hound's after a day's sport, she had not the heart to keep her promise. Then she would sit up beside him, and in the light cast from the pink-shaded, dimly burning lamp gaze at him hour after hour without tiring.

There was always something in his face to study. The frown of wrath, or rather of power, between his brows was more sharply defined than it used to be, and still frightened

her a little. The muscles in his temples were never at rest, and the firm, curved upper lip trembled at the corners as if he were smiling at her in his sleep. He had become thin. In the haggard hollows of his cheeks were shadows spreading towards the jaws which they darkened, and there was a line of suffering about his nostrils. He was like a young Christ, made to be worshipped.

Often as she gazed at him she thought, "If I killed him at this moment—plunged a hat-pin into his heart—then he would belong to me entirely, now and always."

Then she would grope on his left side for his heart, lay the hollow of her hand against it, and fancy that she held it fast in her power, and with his heart, his love for her, and need never more relinquish either.

Once while she stooped over him, contemplating him thus earnestly, she woke him, and he looked at her in alarm, and, still half-asleep, asked :

"What is the matter? Have I hurt you?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Your eyes have such a curious expression, almost as if you were angry with me."

She made a vow that she would not gaze at him any more, but she could not help herself, and stared at him as much as ever. She loved him so dearly.

It was terrible when a sudden anxiety possessed her that she might lose him. Many a night this feeling of fear came over her with such cruel realism that she could hardly resist the impulse to rave and scream and tear her hair out by the roots. But she must not wake him, so she crept gently closer to his side, put one arm behind his back, and flinging the other across his breast, laid her head under his shoulder, and clung to him so tightly that she felt almost as if she were growing into a limb of his body.

Thus she became by degrees calmer, and could have a good cry, or give herself up to fancying how infinitely happy she would make him.

Never since time began would a son of Adam have been so happy. She would wrap him in a mantle of love, so soft and thick that no rude strokes of fate could penetrate it. She would be his Egeria and inspire his muse; with an invisible aureole surrounding her head she would stimulate and encourage him to noble undertakings and great achieve-

ments; she would tend him with the holy devotion of a sister of mercy. . . . She would attend cookery classes, learn laundry-work and dressmaking. No, it would be better for her to go to University lectures, study science and music, and a hundred other useful things, so that he should never find her a dull companion, or a useless helpmate.

For all this, she must of course be free and get rid of Richard. She thought a great deal about him, too; invariably without bitterness or resentment. Long ago he had been forgiven for setting her feet on the downward path.

"Everyone has his own standard of right," Konrad was wont to say. And, after all, to Richard she once owed her salvation.

The new life was to begin publicly as well as privately, with his engagement, which he wrote was on the eve of taking place. But she still felt hardly equal to a crisis. She shuddered at the thought of all the lies that would have to be told to Konrad as soon as a change took place in her household.

She preferred to avoid as long as possible the inevitable hardships lying before her in the future. Only at night, when she lay on the sleeping man's breast, did she work herself up into an ecstasy of sufficient rapture to look forward to poverty and privations shared with him as a royal inheritance of purple and gold. At three o'clock in the morning, when the lamps outside were extinguished one by one, and the reflection of the first grey shadows of cold dawn lay on the ceiling, she was bound in honour to wake him.

He must not meet other residents in the house on account of his own reputation and hers.

As he dressed, he fumbled, half asleep, among the ivory coroneted brushes, and managed to complete a hasty toilette in time to reach the nearest Viennese café as soon as it opened for a pick-me-up in the shape of a black coffee.

For from Lilly's arms he insisted on going straight to his desk. She could not talk him out of this insane proceeding. It was an atonement that the night's pleasure demanded from him, and so he would sit brooding among his books and papers till noon, often unable to write a line from fatigue.

She, on the other hand, sank into a profound slumber, from which she was awakened about ten o'clock by the entry of Adele, smiling approvingly, with the breakfast-tray.

Every other night she allowed him to devote to his work. She had no desire to sap his young life's blood. He made her anxious enough as it was. She did not like his hectic colour, nor the glitter in his eye. It disquieted her to see the abrupt changes in his mood from uproarious gaiety to absent-minded self-absorption.

All this should be altered when—what ?

Oh ! why bother about plans ? Why not go on just as she was—loving him and making him happy ? She passed her days in half-joyous, half-terrified dreams. She now had lost her zest and delight in mental exertion. There were other things that seemed more important than cultivating her intellect—the abject desire to be ever pleasing to his eyes, to hand him with unfailing regularity the intoxicating draught that held him in her toils. Hitherto she had accepted her personal charms as a matter of course, and valued them little more than anything else that was not seen and of no use. Now the cult of her body became a mania, for she so dreaded falling short of the ideal of her that she knew he had engraved on his heart. The desire to be beautiful, and the necessity of remaining beautiful, drove her to adopt methods which she had hitherto disdained. She took as much pains with herself as a woman in a harem. She perfumed her baths, tinted her nails, lengthened her eyebrows, powdered her arms and shoulders, and continually fancied she saw blemishes which needed new cosmetics to remove.

Then she was overtaken by a dread that all this care might only convert her appearance into that of a beautiful professional harlot. For this reason she left off wearing jewellery, and dressed more quietly than a parson's wife. Only the eye of a connoisseur could detect the amount of artistic ingenuity that her plain garb concealed.

Most of all when she was alone did jealousy occupy her thoughts. Not that she imagined he had anything to do with other women. He was far too noble to be suspected of that. But she was jealous of all that he did, and of all his concerns. It was torture to her to think of his writing-table. Every hour not spent in her society seemed like treachery to their love, and she cherished an hostility towards his friends such as she could never have believed herself capable of. Often, on the nights that he spent apart from her, she would keep watch on his rooms. She would stand opposite the

house and look across the street and up at the windows, much as she had once done in the Alte Jakobstrasse. If the lamp was burning in his window she was content, but if she saw him going out or coming in she did not close her eyes all night.

He lived not far away, on the third floor of a Karlsbad lodging-house. It was long before he would allow her to visit him there. Next door to him, he had told her, was an invalid who needed the utmost care; any excitement caused by the sound of strange voices might prove fatal to her. When he spoke of the invalid his eyes avoided meeting hers, and she thought there were a hundred chances to one that he was keeping some secret from her.

When, however, after her persistent entreaties, he admitted her one afternoon she found nothing to confirm her suspicion. She was only besought to speak in a low tone, and she had known she must do this beforehand. His room was little more than a student's den. It was lofty, with two windows, but cheaply furnished—with no sofa and no carpet. On the walls hung rare engravings, and the usual pier-glass was displaced by a valuable copy of the "Madonna de Foligno," which looked down with sublime serenity on the barren wastes of northern Philistinism. Heaps of books were ranged on long low shelves, while others were simply piled on the floor in different corners of the room, covered with pieces of American cloth to keep them from the dust.

The writing-table alone, as might have been expected, boasted a certain luxuriousness. Like the pictures and books, it was Konrad's personal property. It stood, with its handsome carving and wide, open leaf, like a dark and solemn altar in the middle of the room. Not a single photograph of a woman was anywhere to be seen. She had not given him hers, and no other woman's was worthy of a place on his desk. Behind maps and ink-bottles was propped the portrait of an old gentleman in a frame. The face was that of a weather-beaten old gourmet, with beautiful, well-kept white hair, and eyes, peculiar to connoisseurs of women, blinking shrewdly under wrinkled drooping lids.

This was the famous old uncle who had paid for Konrad's education and now supported him.

Lilly was conscious of a profound depression of spirits as she looked at the portrait, as if one glance of those keen old

eyes could read her soul and bring to light the secret that she was keeping from her lover with a thousand artifices and subterfuges.

"I'll take care that I never meet him," she thought.

Konrad took from a drawer his proudest treasure, the introduction to his great work, and showed her the closely written sheets of the manuscript.

She let her fingers pass caressingly over it. She regarded it with quite reverent awe. But then all of a sudden the jealousy that had of late been tormenting her soul attacked her with renewed force.

This manuscript was his real love, and she was nothing but a dark, bloodless shadow, who preyed on his nights like a vulture.

"Lock it up again," she said; and she turned despondently to go.

As if the *magnum opus* was not enough, there was a number of smaller things that kept him drudging. The more his name became known as that of a specialist in literary circles, the more frequently was he asked to contribute articles, and he strove to execute every order he received.

One day it came out what the important post was that he had been offered and had mentioned to her three weeks ago, on their memorable expedition into the country.

"I haven't dared to come to a decision till to-day," he said. "But now I have made up my mind. The editor of the periodical which I am to sub-edit in future has called on me, and left me no loophole for refusing. I was obliged to say 'Yes.' He is a charming fellow! In spite of his great intellectual ability, a man of almost childlike simplicity . . . and so frank, so genial. . . . You must get to know him—if you don't know him already."

"What's his name?" she asked.

"Dr. Salmoni."



## CHAPTER XVIII

**N**O, it was not to come out in this way! Fate was not to lay hands on her quite so rudely and clumsily.

She was to be spared the disgrace of being caught like a criminal and ultimately, by an act of self-denial, she was to prove that she had not been altogether unworthy of the great blessing of her life.

Since the name Salmoni had been mentioned between them, she scarcely dared venture into the streets in Konrad's company. As she walked with him arm-in-arm, she imagined that every step she heard coming behind them was that of the dreaded man who had once followed her into the Alte Jakobstrasse.

At last, to end the torture of this new anxiety, she made up a story to Konrad about a lady she was acquainted with calling on her, and asking who the tall, slim young man was in whose company she was now so often seen.

The result of this necessary lie was terrifying. He would not speak or eat, but strode about the room in great perturbation, finally leaving her at an hour when generally her bliss was just beginning.

The following day brought forth an explanation. He came at dusk, paler than usual, with unnaturally brilliant eyes.

"Listen, dearest!" he said. "I thought it over all last night, and I now see my duty clear before me. This must not go on."

She could interpret this only as a wish to leave her. Her body seemed to become numb; she faced him calmly, and awaited her death-blow.

"Since we have belonged to each other," he continued, "we have made no further allusion to your fiancé. Nevertheless, I have thought all the more about him in private.

You, too, have been very reticent with regard to your friend Herr Dehnicke. I only know that he is at present travelling, and has left you, so to speak, without a protector."

She forced herself to smile. Why must he prolong the agony?

"To-day I must confess to you that in the midst of all my happiness I have felt that my taking advantage of such a situation is altogether despicable. But my feelings are not in question. The main consideration is, what will become of you? What I feared from the first has come to pass: people are beginning to remark on our being together. . . . You can't bind anyone to secrecy. . . . It would be lowering to one's dignity. Thus the mutual friend of you and your betrothed is certain, sooner or later, to hear all about it, and to call you to account. You will be, of course, too proud to deny it, and the upshot of it all is that you will be left stranded and alone—without any sort of guardianship in the world. For I, as matters now stand, have not even the right to protect you. The thought is perfectly intolerable to me, whatever it may be to others."

He jumped up, ran his fingers through the imaginary mane of hair, and tramped up and down.

She came slowly back to life and consciousness, as the blood began to course more naturally through her veins.

The dear, noble boy! How unsuspecting he was! She could have almost shrieked with laughter. But she controlled herself and said: "You needn't disturb yourself, Konni. His friend is not likely to hear anything, and if he does he won't believe it. And even if he does believe it, he will take good care that . . ."

She could not go on. The great guileless eyes frightened her.

"You think, then, he would . . ."

He too hesitated, unable to find words in which to express the unspeakable.

She examined the buttons on her bodice and didn't answer.

"When is Herr Dehnicke coming home?" he asked.

"It is not certain. He is gone wife-hunting," she replied, with a little feeling of triumph at having said something that placed her miles outside the radius of any suspicion now or to come.

"Where is he at present?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Because I must have a talk with him."

She could hardly credit what she heard. He couldn't have said it. Surely, either he or she must be taking leave of their senses.

"Don't be anxious," he said. "I am quite aware what I owe to your reputation. But I must find out once for all what opinion he has of your position. . . . Here is a man in America who has your promise, yet makes no sign. . . . He doesn't turn up, and he doesn't write. Why doesn't he write? If he hasn't got your address, why should he not write through Herr Dehnicke, whose business is known all over Berlin? No one is even sure if he is still alive. For a long time I tried to explain his silence in various ways; but now I can't help saying to myself, the only explanation there can possibly be is that he is dead, or as good as dead. Are you to continue bound to a dead man? Is your social existence to be dependent, as it were, on a guard of honour who has nothing to guard? This is the point I would like to discuss with the mutual friend. He'll have to answer me, or do you think he'll object?"

Really, he has less knowledge of the world than is permissible, she thought compassionately; and aloud she replied, "I don't quite see, Konni, how you are justified in forcing an interview on a stranger."

"That's my affair," he said, throwing back his head defiantly. "First, I must know if he will let you be free to do as you like. I don't see why he should hold the slave-driver's whip over you."

"And I don't see why you should put yourself in a false position," she cried in newly awakened alarm. Already she heard fisticuffs and pistol-shots resounding in her ears. "I will speak to Herr Dehnicke myself; I will set myself free. I promise you that. But you . . . if I let you go to him, what will he think of me? You will only succeed in compromising me."

He drew himself up. His eyes were those of a conqueror. "If a man loves you and wants you for his wife, I fail to see how that can compromise you."

It was dusk and oppressively close when these words were spoken. The little bullfinch flapped its wings languidly in

its sand, the goldfish remained motionless behind their wall of hot glass, and the small naked monkey whimpered in his sleep. Heavy masses of bluish-black clouds were reflected in the slimy water of the canal. There was a menace of storm in the air—and this was the thunderbolt.

Her first feeling was one of surprise—certainly not pleasant surprise; then followed an unutterably plaintive cry, unheard by any human ear, and which hurt all the more because it was dumb.

“Too late . . . played out . . . past caring. No more happiness on earth . . . too late . . . too late!”

She leaned back in the sofa-corner and examined the ceiling minutely and carefully.

He waited for his answer.

If she lowered her eyes they must meet his, full of a fire which burned into her soul. No salvation from these eyes, no escape from what had to come!

And he waited.

Then she heard her own voice speaking quite calmly and distinctly, as if instead of herself Frau Julia was speaking—life's little mountebank with the brow of brass.

“I thought, dear Konni, we had agreed that neither of us should talk of marrying.”

“How can you remind me of that?” he cried vehemently. “When I said so, could I foresee how things would turn out? Had I the least inkling then of what you are? Did I know you were so divine an angel, who can exalt a poor devil like me one moment into a seventh heaven of bliss, and the next plunge him into hell's torments? . . . Yes, I mean it! Torments, for to-day all must come out—the unvarnished truth. There's a gap in my life. All is in chaos: my work, my thought, my faith in you. You would be my good genius, but often you are something almost the reverse. Don't distress yourself. I am not reproaching you . . . but only myself, for being so weak. . . . I want to work; I ought to work. . . . I have just undertaken a whole pile of new duties. I thought that if my duty was imposed on me from outside, I should be bound to stick to it. But the very opposite has happened. I am running to seed through perpetual inner wrestling and questioning. . . . If I don't bring our lives into a peaceful and equable

channel, we must both be lost. I can't do it unless you belong to me properly and altogether, unless your room is next to mine and you are always within sight of my desk—always near, always beside me."

"I can arrange to come to you in the autumn," she interrupted timorously.

"No, not in that way! I will have no more secretiveness, no more ground for self-reproaches. Am I to have it on my conscience that every day you sacrifice yourself for me further you come nearer to your ruin? For in the end it must ruin you; it will stick to you like mud. And why should we make a polluted thing out of what is most sacred to us? Or is it that I am not good enough to be your lasting companion through life? Do you shrink from being my wife on the score of poverty?"

In repudiation of this idea she almost screamed aloud.

"What you have and how much," he continued, "I do not wish to inquire. I am well enough off for both of us. My uncle allows me three hundred marks a month, and I get four hundred from Dr. Salmoni."

Ah! how she shuddered at that name!

"Besides, I can easily earn three hundred marks by articles alone . . . that's altogether a thousand marks a month. As good as a general's pay. . . . Isn't that enough for you?"

"Oh, for pity's sake, be quiet!" she cried, hardly able to contain herself. "I wasn't thinking of money."

"Of what, then?"

He planted himself in front of her with an air of challenge. The dent of wrath was between his brows, as if it had been chiselled there. She bowed her head. Since the days of the colonel she had never been so afraid of any man.

"Well, why not? Out with it and say what it is! To all appearances you do not love me sufficiently. You still cling, perhaps, to the memory of the fellow who has long ago forgotten you. You may probably have said to yourself, 'I can make use of this foolish boy as a lover *pro tem*. He's all very well as an amusement to pass the time, but when it comes to his seriously interfering with the course of my life, I must get rid of him—throw him over, eh?' Isn't that it? Be brave and say it straight out! I am merely a stop-gap, not the sort of man you want for a husband. Not till I have

begun to make a name could you think of marriage. Am I not right? Very well."

He had taken up his hat, and looked as if he intended going.

"Oh, Konni, have mercy on me!" she implored. She had slid down from her seat in order to clasp his knees. Now she cowered on the floor between the sofa and his chair.

"There is no need for me to have mercy, or for you to have mercy!" he exclaimed. "Till to-day you have been the holiest thing on earth to me. But I cannot submit to being brushed away like a fly. Tell me why you won't marry me. One plausible reason will satisfy me. When you have given it, I promise never to return to the subject."

"Give me till to-morrow," she moaned.

"Why till to-morrow? To-day is the same thing. I cannot go through another night of torturing suspense."

"I'll write."

He was evidently amazed. "Write? What is there to write?"

"Whether I may or not. The reasons and everything."

"Some way out of it will come to me in the night," she thought.

"When shall I get the letter?"

"To-morrow morning by the first post."

"Very well. Till then I will have patience. Good-bye, Lilly, for the present."

He helped her back to the sofa and held out his hand in farewell, and as she saw his great eyes fixed on her, with that steadfast clearness which no lie or suspicion of a lie had ever clouded, she knew there was no escape for her. Evasion was no longer to be thought of; the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, was what Konrad must be told. It swept over her like a warm, soothing stream: "Whether it means your damnation or not, he shall know the truth." Only, to tell him face to face was more than any mortal could endure.

When she was alone, reaction set in. The instincts of self-preservation asserted their rights. Surely, what Frau Julia had done she could do. She had had far worse things to explain away.

Richard would undoubtedly keep silent, and that was the most important point. Now that he was bent on marrying, it would be in his own best interests to allow her to vanish

as gracefully as possible out of his life. The rest of "the crew" might gossip as much as they liked. Konrad was invulnerable to their slander.

The one danger ahead was Dr. Salmoni. But she had only to go to him, to entreat his silence, and he, too, would hold his tongue. He certainly would have good cause to prefer that his abominable attempted assault should not be brought to light. So she reflected. Yet in the midst of her planning and scheming a sudden disgust of herself and what she was going to do seized her, and shattered with one blow the whole fabric of intended deception.

If the mere name of Dr. Salmoni had prevented her going out in the streets with Konrad, how could she expect to pass her life at his side without quailing in hourly fear? How numerous would be the snubs and humiliations she must expect directly Konrad made any attempt to introduce her as his wife into the society to which he belonged! She who had figured in the newspapers as the latest acquisition to the circles of the fashionable demi-monde! And what if he too began to suspect? How he would be consumed with shame and horror—he who was so proud, and the mirror of all refinement, whose pure unworldliness alone accounted for his not seeing what sort of life she had been leading! What an awakening that would be from a short tormenting dream!

No, she could not emulate Frau Julia after all. And she thrust from her with scorn the atrocious thought which in the stress of the hour she had stained her soul by entertaining.

An exultant longing for self-destruction came over her, and she felt a strong impulse to tear her heart from her breast and hurl it at his feet as she sat down and wrote:

"MY DEAR SWEET KONNI,

"I have shamefully deceived you. I am a bad woman, and nothing else. The fiancé I have told you about never existed. That despicable little cur of a lieutenant for whom I was untrue to my husband never dreamed of marrying me, but handed me over to his rich friend, who made me his mistress. And that is what I am now. For years I have been living in a world of vice and vulgarity. Long ago I was ostracised from all decent society. Kept women and the lovers who financed them have been my sole associates. I have clung to you because you in your ignorance respected

me, and I, in my slough of degradation, longed to be respected. So now you know why I cannot be your wife.

"If you want my kisses, come. For anything more, I am no longer good enough.

"LILLY."

The clock struck eleven. Adele had gone to bed. She would have to go down herself to drop the letter in the box. But the long-threatened storm just then burst in fury. Hailstones rattled down, and gusts of wind rushed through the open windows, scattering raindrops on the writing-table. The paper on which her dry feverish eyes were fixed became wet ; it looked as if she had drenched it with her tears.

"That is a happy coincidence," she thought. Then she was ashamed. The time for acting was surely over. But as she settled herself to rewrite the letter she stopped, shuddering in horror. What was to be gained by such a monstrous indictment of self? And was it, after all, the truth? In the slanderous mouth, perhaps, of a back-biting woman who twists out of bare facts evidence of crime against a friend, or in that of one of those social hangmen who have a halter ready for every past. She alone knew how it had all come about. How from inner necessity and outer compulsion, from too-confiding trustfulness and unprotected innocence, link by link the chain had been forged, which now clanked its weight of guilt about her limbs. She, at least, knew that there was another less harsh and hideous truth, which would excuse and purify her in the eyes of any sympathetic person.

So she tore up the sheet of notepaper and began again. She made a rough copy, and then polished and polished till it satisfied her.

Now the letter ran :

"DEAREST AND BELOVED FRIEND,

"She who writes you these lines is a most unfortunate woman, whom you really know very little about, and who had to deceive you until to-day because all that is most sacred to her—her love for you—was at stake. And now, by writing this, that also is lost ! I sacrifice it on the altar of your happiness for the sake of the divine fire that flashes from your eyes, consecrating and ennobling my soul.



"The world has treated me cruelly. It has wrenched from me by degrees my faith in human nature, my ideals, my buoyancy of spirit; it has brought me to sin, and so robbed me of the right to continue my journey through life at your side.

"I set out once on that journey full of confidence and hopefulness, and pure to the very core of my being. But every man I was destined to meet plucked off a twig of my virtue. I lifted my eyes in adoring reverence to the aged husband who promised to be my hero and master, my pattern and god. He used me as a tool for his basest lusts.

"Another came, who was young as I was, whom I wanted to save while I saved myself in his arms. He took me and enjoyed me as if I were a romantic adventure, then flung me off and went to the dogs. He wrote a Uriah sort of letter to a friend of his, who took mean advantage of my stranded position, both spiritual and physical, and made me by a low trick so dependent on him that I found I had been long completely in his power without knowing it. Helpless and utterly crushed as I was, I yielded and became his victim and slave, and I had not even the spirit left to be angry with him.

"This was the pass to which my destiny brought me. In vain I tried to struggle out of the darkness of night, but nowhere did I see light breaking ahead. I caught with enthusiasm at any hand held out to me, but each seemed to pull me down lower, till my whole being seemed paralysed with hopeless despair.

"Then you came, my beloved, my saviour, my redeemer! Once more it was light around me, once more the world burst into blossom, the parched fountains were unsealed, and 'The Song of Songs' echoed again within me.

"And with pride and elation I recognised the fact that nothing impure had taken root in my character; that the days of degradation had passed over me without touching my integrity of soul, my desire for pure and beautiful things, my instincts for a lofty humanity. It had all been only slumbering, and you, beloved, have awakened it to new life.

"And even if I may not be your wife—only one free of stain deserves you—I want to be worthy of you, whether near you or far away, as you decree.

"I am quite resolved to free myself from the shackles that so long have encumbered me outwardly, and to ascend out of

the misery of my lot to a higher life, more in harmony with the demands of my inner self. You have pointed the way, and in gratitude I kiss your dear, gentle, diligent hand.

"Good-bye, my love! If you want to punish me, never come near me again. But, if you can put up with the love of a woman who loves you as you never can be loved again on earth, do not let me perish. I have nothing but what I am to give you, but that is yours till death.

"LILLY."

She read and reread what she had written, and worked herself up into a state of rapture over it.

Now the truth appeared in quite another light. And then all at once the question rose within her: But is *this* the truth? Was it not rather a conglomeration of turgid phrases expressive of high-flown emotions which were not spontaneous or sincere, belonging to the pages of sensational novels, but not to herself? Instead of despair she had in reality only suffered from boredom, and in the "darkness of night" she had many times enjoyed herself thoroughly and held high revel. She had made out that the worthy Richard was a tyrannical despot and herself a poor downtrodden victim, whereas she had always been at liberty to do what she liked.

It was the truth, and yet it was—just as much and as little the truth as she had confessed in that first terrible letter. It was possible to write this letter and that letter, and many another; but the truth, the genuine, illuminating, naked truth, would not be in any.

She herself did not know what it was, and no one else knew.

The truth had dissolved into nothingness the moment after the events to which it related had happened, and no power on earth could conjure it up again. A distorted mirage, changing with her mood and as her pen moved over the paper, was all that was left of it.

"But I don't want to tell any more lies," she cried to herself, tearing up the second letter. "To-day, at any rate, I want to speak the truth."

Should she write a third letter?

It was long past midnight. Her eyes burned. Over-excitement made her temples throb. And to-morrow morning he must have his answer, as she had sworn he should.

Then suddenly she awakened to a consciousness of what

had really been happening, how during the last four hours she had been face to face with the danger of losing him for ever. A frenzy of sickening anxiety overwhelmed her. She ran about the flat, reeled, battered herself against the walls, rushed to the window and cried out his name. She must go to him, go to him at once. It was the only thought she was able to grasp. She would get the front door opened somehow, wake him out of his sleep, force her way into his room, stay with him to-night and always, no matter what the consequences might be. . . . She did not care. Only to be quit of this dread, which consumed her like a furnace.

The thunderstorm had raged itself out, but rain was still falling steadily. She scarcely gave herself time to fling on a cloak. In her house-shoes, without hat or umbrella, she flew along the streets, splashing through the mud and puddles, followed by foul epithets from homeless night-waifs in dark doorways. She arrived breathless and panting at his lodgings.

Light glimmered in the two windows on the third floor. She clapped her hands and called out "Konni! Konni!" repeating his name several times. But he had closed the windows and did not hear her.

As she stared up at his window, she saw the shadow of his tall figure on the blind glide up and down, from one end of the room to the other—up and down, up and down. And all the time the rain was descending on her in torrents, and the chill dampness of the street creeping up her limbs.

"Konni! Konni!" she cried louder. Foot-passengers who went by offered her their umbrellas, others mimicked her, and called out too, "Konni! Konni!" Then at last the restless shadow came to a standstill. One of the windows was opened.

"Lilly, is it you?" he asked, in a voice hoarse with alarm.

"Now here you are at last, my sweetest Konni," answered, instead of Lilly, an exhilarated gentleman who insisted on holding his umbrella over her.

"My God!"

Upstairs it became dark, and a few moments later he was standing with the lamp and door-key in his hand at the glass entrance-door.

The exhilarated gentleman took his leave, with repeated bows.

"Lilly, what has happened? What are you doing here?"

She crouched trembling against the doorway. She could not speak. She had only one sensation—that she was with him now, and all would be well.

He felt her clothes.

"You are wet through! . . . You have only house-shoes on! My God, Lilly!"

She tried to say something, but she was ashamed that he should see how her teeth chattered.

"And I can't take you in. You know why. . . . But I must—yes, I must take you in. If I let you go home like this you'll catch your death. We must be very quiet—as we were before. We mayn't speak above a whisper. The invalid is still not out of danger. Give me your hand. . . . Come!"

With eyes half closed, she suffered him to lead her up the stairs. Her wet dress flapped against the banisters. She felt as if she must cower down on one of the steps and lie there till the charwoman came with her broom and swept her away. Yet she went on climbing the stairs, drawing nearer every minute to the fate in store for her above. With bowed head she followed him down the passage into his room, where the lingering sultriness of the summer day half stifled her. Konrad pushed her down into his easy-chair. He drew off the soaked velvet rags from her feet, and brought her dry stockings. The wet dress too he peeled from her body, threw his great-coat round her shoulders, and wrapped her in warm blankets.

She let him do it all impassively, wishing to enjoy to the full his tender care of her. So far she had not spoken a word. Now, when she wanted to thank him, he pointed to the door of the adjoining room.

"Speak low," he whispered in her ear beseechingly. "The poor thing seems to be having a good night for the first time."

Faint compassion awoke in her; yet talking was imperative.

"What is the matter with her?" she asked under her breath. "Tell me."

He hesitated. "The landlady has sworn me to strictest secrecy. . . . But you are part of myself; I may tell you. The girl, her only child, ran away three or four months ago, and was confined in secret. Her mother went and brought her home, and for six weeks she has been lying between life and death; at last she has taken a turn for the better."

"Poor thing!" she said, and then the consciousness of her own wretchedness came over her with renewed force.

"Konni, Konni," she wailed whisperingly on his breast, "it's all over now. I wanted to starve with you, beg, do anything; but what's the use? . . . When you know all. . . ."

"How can that make any difference, dearest?"

"I mean about me—my life, my past."

He disengaged himself with a slight jerk and sat down opposite her. The inquiring look of consternation, which stiffened his pale face like a mask, filled her with a fresh fear. This time it was not fear of him, but fear for him. She was afraid of causing him pain, making her own suffering his.

"I was going to write to you everything exactly as it happened, but somehow it wouldn't come. As I wrote, it got all wrong. So instead I came, came to you in the middle of the night. If you like, I will tell you . . . all . . . now."

She could not go on, and buried her face on the edge of the writing-table.

"Why don't you speak, then?"

He had quite forgotten his strict injunctions about keeping quiet. Both started at the sudden sound of his voice.

"She is probably asleep," he said, again lowering his tone. "So speak out at last. What can it be that you have to say?"

His breath came heavily, under the weight of anxiety that oppressed him.

And she began. Bending towards him, she tried to relate in a whisper the history for which she had not been able to find words at home.

And this time, too, it was not the truth. She felt that it was not. It was even less, much less, the truth than what she had written in her letters. No power on earth could have induced her to pain him with every sordid detail. So she told of a long succession of martyrdoms, and in a funereal train let her injuries, humiliations, and insults pass in review before him. All had been darkness around her, unrelieved by a ray of hope or light. She had struggled in vain for deliverance and salvation, had made a dismal sacrifice of herself for no end. So she talked on. And he, half turned to stone, with wide-open eyes, listened. Only at the name "Salmoni," which she dared not withhold, he started and shrank from her.

They had both entirely forgotten the patient in the next room. Constantly she had to wipe tears out of her eyes ; she grew indignant with herself and others by fits and starts, skated gingerly over places where the ice was thin, indulged in self-reproaches, and said to herself defiantly as she drew near the end : " This *is* the truth." And it was, in the sense that it was an inventory of the best in her ; the truth as she hoped, with justice, it might shape itself in his perplexed vision.

There was silence. Her glance glided guiltily beyond him and rested on the portrait which leered at her from the writing-table with cynical worldly eyes, as much as to say : " I know you, my dear child, better than you know yourself." Something familiar and confidential lay in those eyes, a sort of reflection from that mad nierry world which she had just been representing as a purgatory of tortures.

Fascinated, she dared not look away from them, and their mocking searching gaze stripped her soul bare, and caused every gleam of hope to die within her.

The silence became painful. Their thoughts seemed to vibrate in zigzags through the breathless stillness of the room. Then suddenly it was broken by a low piteous moaning, muffled at first, as if a handkerchief were being thrust into the mouth, then breaking out again more violently and loudly. It came from the next room, where the sick girl who had sinned secretly had been struggling for so many weeks for her young life. Soon, crooning words of comfort mingled with the moans. The girl's mother had come from the room beyond where she slept to ascertain the cause of this fresh outburst of grief.

Their eyes met. " She must have heard everything," their glance seemed to say.

For a moment another's misfortune made them forget their own. The great flood of suffering common to humanity swept over them, softening the sting of their own personal woes. The sobbing now was smothered by the pillows.

" My pet, my own ! " entreated the mother's consoling voice, every intonation of it overflowing with love ; " be good again, my darling . . . it's not so very dreadful. . . . We will bring up the little one, and even if he doesn't marry you it won't matter so much. Think we shall have the little baby, and what a joy it will be when the baby laughs

and says, 'mamma.' You see, it is not so very bad, after all, my pet, is it?"

The sobbing subsided and gave place to a gurgling sigh of content.

"'It's not so very bad, after all.' Ah! I wish someone would say that to me," thought Lilly.

But no one ever would. A burning desire to be soothed and comforted, even as the poor little sinner in the next room was being comforted, rose within her. "She has her mother!" she moaned, bursting into tears, "but I haven't anyone."

Konrad bent over her and drew her hands from her face. In his sorrowful eyes a radiance dawned, so dear, so full of unspeakable loving-kindness, that he was quite transfigured, and seemed like a visitant from another world.

"Haven't you got me?" he asked.

"Yes, but you can't help me now," she said. "How can you endure me any longer?"

In the next room all was still again. Now the girl's mother must also be aware that he was entertaining a belated guest.

"Listen," he whispered, with his lips close to her ear. "We mustn't talk much, and my head's going round; but there's one thing that seems quite clear to me, and that is, the absurdity of everything that we call guilt and sin when two people love each other . . . and when one of them has suffered like you. To me you have always been an angel, and an angel you shall continue to be in the future."

"In the future?" she stammered, listening eagerly. "Is there any future?"

He wiped his forehead, which was damp from perspiration.

"I don't know yet," he said. "I only know that I cannot live without you."

She closed her eyes. She wanted the dream to last.

"It may not be now as we hoped of course." She noticed that his words came haltingly. "Everything will have to be different."

"But nothing in your life ought to be altered," she said; "it mustn't be different."

"You can't disregard facts, dear. Where we shall live

it's impossible to say yet ; but we shall find some corner of the earth where no one knows us."

For the first time it dawned on her what he meant. And forgetful of herself, the sick girl, and everything else, she sank down on her knees with a cry, and sobbed :

" I won't let you ! You shall not do it ! You know the world so little. You are far too young. You don't know what you are doing. You mustn't sacrifice yourself. . . . I don't want to ruin you. I love you too well for that."

He bent back her head and stroked the hair out of her eyes. Oh ! if there had not been that heavenly light of goodness and of suffering in his eyes ! A whole world of grief already burned in their depths.

" If we've come to the question of sacrifice," he said, " then I must ask you to make a sacrifice for me. Will you ? "

" Yes—anything. Do you want me to die ? Say it."

" I only want you to do one thing. Come to me as you are. Don't bring a single bit of your property with you. Never go back to your . . . that flat. From this moment let it all be as if it had never been. Promise me that."

She struggled against a feeling of shock.

Not go home ! Never see her dear corner drawing-room again, nor the little bullfinch ; never give Peterle his dinner again ! Never !

A horrid feeling that it was insane folly to ask this came and went like a splash of mud. Then she answered in hasty resolution :

" Yes, I promise."

He breathed deeply. " Now we will keep quite still," he said. " The girl must get her sleep, and to-morrow I will explain everything to the landlady."

" But your great work ? " she asked, attacked by another fit of self-reproach. " What will become of it ? "

A melancholy smile stole over his face.

" Who knows ? It will depend on my uncle. If he consents, we can live as we like. . . . All will be well."

" And if he doesn't ? "

His right hand, which had been caressing her hair unceasingly from her forehead downwards to her neck, for a moment pressed her crown almost painfully, as if by the closer contact gathering strength for the approaching life's battle.



"Then all will be well too," he said, and smiled again.

A few minutes later she lay beside him on the narrow camp-bedstead, the hard edges of which hurt her limbs. Her head was on his shoulder ; her arms, one under his back, the other flung across his chest, clung to him as always, when she sought solace and protection from him in trouble. But this time *she* slept, and *he* kept watch.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE old lampshade-maker of the Neanderstrasse was not a little astonished when her former lodger, whom she had always admired as a smartly-turned-out grand lady, came one day in a badly fitting alpaca coat and skirt, and a sailor hat with a grass-green ribbon round it, and asked to be taken in. Last year's young lady occupant of the best room having recently married, however, she was glad to let it again to Lilly.

Thus it happened that Frau Laue's fiery crimson plush upholstery once more played a part in her life. The pictures of famous actors smiled down on her patronisingly from the walls, and she was reminded of the connection between cleanliness of person and purity of conscience as she made her toilette.

Konrad, in touching concern for her appearance, drew all the money that he had saved out of the bank—about five hundred marks altogether—and had purchased her a wardrobe at the draper's, for she could not go out and shop for herself in the costume she had worn the night that she came to his rooms. He had been persuaded by the shopgirls to buy the most ridiculous things. She would have died of laughing if he hadn't laid out a great deal of his money on them.

Dressed in the shoddy apparel, she felt she was masquerading, and not for the world would she now have been seen in the streets.

Frau Laue shook her head doubtfully.

"Four years ago you left me with court-dresses, bracelets, and brooches, and all sorts of lovely things, and now you are come back in these rags! That doesn't seem to me to be fitting to your career, Lilly dear."

Neither did Konrad find favour in the old lady's eyes.

"He's too young for you," she said, "and not enough of a

swell. He may have high ideals, and be sentimental, otherwise he wouldn't see anything in you ; but I tell you all that high-flown rubbish means sorrow."

To Lilly this chatter was intensely objectionable. But as she had nothing to do all day, she sat down with Frau Laue, as had been her wont of old, and helped her tap and press her dried flowers. And often it seemed as if she had never been away.

The first day of her absence she had written to Adele—without giving her address, of course—and instructed her not to be concerned about her, but to continue her duties at the flat till Herr Dehnicke came back.

It was more difficult to write a letter of farewell to Richard. She made no allusion to her engagement, which was to be kept secret for the present, and gave as the sole motive of her flight an ardent desire to live a new life. She again expressed herself unwilling to stand in the way of his matrimonial prospects, and ended with heartfelt cordiality, which robbed the separation of every sort of bitterness. On reading the letter over, she experienced a genuine pang of parting emotion, of which she was a little ashamed.

Days went by. The new life that for years had been the subject of her fondest dreams had begun, and under auspices happier than any her imagination had ever dared to depict.

At the side of the man she loved, whom but a few days ago it would have seemed arrogance and sacrilege to have thought of possessing, she was to enter again the society from which she had been banned—rescued, purified, regenerate.

Who could have believed it possible ? Yet, for all that, it required an effort to realise and appreciate this unheard-of happiness. The more she said to herself that this was a period of transition that would soon be over, the more she felt the sordid wretchedness of the old quarters that had become so strange to her. The frowsy atmosphere, the spiritual flatness, the want of decent clothes and money, the bad food and service, all weighed on her spirit and left the impression that instead of ascending to honour and position she had on the contrary sunk suddenly from affluence and splendour into a degraded poverty. No matter how much she scolded herself for this ungracious mood, it remained with her and would not budge. And she could not explain why it should be so. Five years ago, when she had really come down from high places, a spoilt

child of fortune, petted and used to every luxury and attention, she had hardly suffered at all from the dreary squalor of her surroundings ; and, though without any prospects to speak of, she could still hope. But now, when the idle pleasures of a frivolous existence lay behind her, and she had been happily drawn out of the slough, when her beloved was at her side, ready to fling open the doors for her to enter into a kingdom of undreamed-of joy, she nearly choked among the red plush furniture, vexed her soul about trifles, and pined for a bathroom and a hairdresser's services.

Some change had come over her during these years, but what it was, though she racked her brains in thinking about it, she could not discover.

In the midst of these trials, her anxiety with regard to Konrad gave her no peace. She was subject to violent heart-beatings at the mere thought of him. Her conscience perpetually stabbed her. She longed for expiation, reproached herself, and in her secret soul reproached him too.

She dared no longer think of him with the rapture of desire as formerly, yet she was always on the lookout for a message or letter from him. If he did write, it was never enough to please her, but if he was silent she grumbled and fretted, although she knew that he had scarcely a moment to call his own during the day, and was drudging harder than he had ever done for her sake.

Between eight and nine in the evening he arrived, laden with books and papers. He had manuscripts to read, proofs to go through, and letters to answer. He scarcely gave himself time to eat, and while he swallowed a few mouthfuls, troubled thoughts of things that he had forgotten to do during the day constantly occurred to his over-taxed mind.

Hours devoted to amorous dalliance were out of the question. Often indeed he fell asleep in a corner of the sofa in the middle of his work. Then Lilly could contemplate at her leisure the ravages his strenuous life had made on him. He looked haggard and worn, his clothes were neglected, and the velvety blue sheen of his cheeks, in which she had taken such delight, had given place to pimples and a stubbly growth of hair.

She would have given anything to know what he was really thinking about her at the bottom of his soul, but she could

extract nothing from him. Dumbly he gazed before him with burning eyes, his lips so tightly compressed that the edge of a razor could not have been inserted between them. She had no grounds for doubting him, for she knew that all his energies were concentrated on preparing for their joint future.

The post of professor of German in a college in Buenos Ayres was vacant, also a similar post in Caracas, and on the other side of the herring-pond he could easily get employment on any university staff. All that was necessary was a few testimonials from celebrated professors.

It was only in the contingency of his uncle disapproving of his marriage and cutting him off that he laid these plans. If the old man said "Yes," there would be ample means to set up housekeeping anywhere they liked, and in surroundings most congenial for the precious work.

Konrad had at once announced his engagement to his uncle, and given a heart-moving account of Lilly's past. He did not conceal that there had been stains on it, but he emphasised the more her fine qualities, her inner purity, her grandeur of soul, her gifts of mind, the wealth of her intellectual interests.

He read her an extract from a copy of the letter after he had despatched it, sounding like the manifesto of a social revolution :

"I know you are, thank God, as I am, far above the narrow Philistine conventions of society, the uncharitable social standards, the Pharisaism that entitles itself to be the guardian of public morals and would sacrifice all aspirations, freedom of conduct, and high living to the fetish of family-life bondage. You have travelled in all parts of the world and learned how mutable are the laws of morality everywhere, how hollow the sham of pretending to regard each as the divinely ordained dogma, and how hypocritical the sly methods by which men wriggle out of them. You know that in the realm of ethics there is one thing alone that commands unconditionally a reverence and esteem, and that is the will to *kallokagathia*, to that mode of living in which the super-men of all times combined the Good and Beautiful. Yes, in her aspirations and her troubles, *she* has personified the good and beautiful for me, and has brought into my life imperial rights and the dawn of morning's glory."

Could anything be more splendidly and touchingly put ?

Who could be so crassly dull and stupid as to resist the power of such language? And with this she consoled him when he was weighed down with a feeling of depression about the uncertainty of their immediate future.

A week passed before the answer came, the longed-for answer that meant joy or despair to two human beings.

"MY DEAR BOY,

"I have no idea what *kallokagathia* means, and other foreign words of the kind. It is half a century since I ran away from school, but, all the same, I flatter myself that I have a keen eye for faces, and can take a man's measure pretty accurately, whether it's striking a bargain on the Yoshiwara, on the Stock Exchange, or at a game of baccarat. Nevertheless, this insight did not stand in the way of my being fleeced and of making a fool of myself about women. My life represents a long sequence of such blunders. Once I wanted to bring home a young Circassian because her eyebrows grew prettily; another time I nearly married a little Musme, because she understood how to massage my feet. I won't recount how many times I wanted to act the part of saviour of souls, for everyone goes through that phase. Fortunately, the patron divinity of old rips and old bachelors—with your wide classical learning you may be able to tell me who he is—has hitherto had the grace to save me from putting my plans into execution. *Your* case, however, appears on the surface to be essentially different. If, as you relate, your sweetheart is a pattern with every attribute of virtue—life is full of surprises—and if she doesn't pose as a repentant magdalen, then I shall with the greatest enjoyment give respectability, which I have detested all my life, a slap in the face by bestowing on you my hearty blessing. But if by any chance your love affair bears a family likeness to my own tender recollections, you must excuse me if I back out of any responsibility with regard to what you call your future and break off my relations with you. The best plan I can think of is to come to Berlin to-morrow, and to ask you and your future bride to keep an evening free for your old uncle. As I don't know as yet the best place to dine at, I will fix a *rendezvous* later. Till then,

"Your affectionate

"UNCLE RENNSCHMIDT."

For the first time during these sad days, Lilly saw Konrad's face relax into a smile.

"If that is his attitude," he said, "there is nothing to fear. One glance at you and his doubts will be dissipated; besides, who in the world could possibly resist you? You have only to make yourself a little nice to him and he will be your slave."

But Lilly cherished secret misgivings.

If only she had her old extensive wardrobe to select from, she might, with great care, have made herself as presentable as she could wish in his uncle's eyes; but in either of these two ready-made little frocks—which only by pinning she could make fit her—without ornaments and the hundred and one etceteras that contribute to a perfect *ensemble*, how was she to achieve the conquest of the old connoisseur of women?

"I am afraid I shall have to put you to the expense of an evening dress," she said timidly.

He was delighted at the idea. Anything she wanted she must have, of course. A hat with feathers, a lace scarf . . . like those he had seen her in. And he handed out two hundred and sixty marks, all that he had left, for her purchases. Poor dear boy! what did he know of the costliness of *chic* in the world of fashion?

When he was gone she thought it over. While she was trying to devise plans of getting herself up decently out of the means at her disposal, there were dozens of lovely dresses hanging in the cupboards of her old flat, dresses that he had never seen in his life, for she had never been escorted by him to any party. And the lace scarf, which had cost a fortune, was there too, and God only knew what besides. She dared hardly trust herself to think of all these wasted treasures.

With all her might she resisted the temptation. She had given him her word of honour, and, whoever else she might deceive, she could not deceive Konrad. So she decided to go on a shopping expedition the next morning. There might be something she could pick up in stock at Wertheim's or Gerson's that would prove a bargain. She was well known in the shops, and though never extravagant, was noted for always choosing the very best materials. What astonishment would be depicted on the faces of the saleswomen when they beheld her in her present cheap, shoddy clothes!

No; it would be too painful an ordeal. She couldn't go through it. Yet think and think it over as she did by

the hour, nothing could prevent her thoughts travelling back to the wardrobes where her finery reposed, silently offering her an exquisite choice. Nowhere could she find a loophole by which she could evade her promise, nowhere an excuse for the crime of breaking it. In spite of all this wrestling with herself, the night passed in happy dreams, for the sun of hope had risen once more. And, as usual, when Lilly's sleep was refreshing and profound, she felt her senses lapped in familiar melodies. The "Moonlight Sonata" stole on her, and Grieg's "Ung Birken," and, with the Rhine maidens' motif out of "The Ring," "The Song of Songs."

As she lay half awake the aria still rang in her ears : "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field."

And then, in sudden terror, she started up in bed crying out, "The Song of Songs!" The score—her precious roll of music—her heritage—where was it?

In a drawer of the *escritoire* in the corner drawing-room—buried, forgotten.

She had never given it a single thought.

Now there was no longer any question of keeping her promise. If in that supreme hour she had kept her head, she would never have given it. She had been casting about for an excuse, and now here was more than an excuse, a justification. No pangs of conscience troubled her. This was a sacred cause, for which she must go through fire and water.

Before eight o'clock she was out of the house. The sun-drenched mist of the rosy August morning melted into a violet sky; from the yellowing poplars dropped sooty dew, and the electric trams hummed their secret storm-signals.

She mingled with the little crowd that gathered and melted again at the nearest stopping-station waiting for the car which was to take her west. Nervously she looked about her, fearful that Konrad might chance to come along the street; and when seated in the tramcar she screened her face with the morning paper that she had brought. Along the canal path she glided, under cover of the trees, like a hunted animal.

And so she came to the flat at last. The porter was sweeping the steps, as he did every morning, and greeted her with an exclamation of wonder and pleasure. The greengrocer whose stall was in the cellar gave her a roguish welcome, and his small fry, to whom she had sometimes given a bonbon, hung



on to her skirts in jubilation. Altogether it felt like coming home.

Adele was still in bed. Why shouldn't she be? There was nothing for her to do.

When Lilly opened the door of her room she displayed unbounded delight. She even shed tears of satisfaction, and Lilly all at once realised what she was losing in her.

Everything shone brightly in the morning sunshine. The flowers had been watered. The bullfinch flapped his wings in greeting, and Peterle nearly broke the bars of his cage to scramble up on her shoulder. She scarcely knew whom to attend to first—out of sheer happiness and affection.

There were three letters and two telegrams on the salver. The letters were in Richard's handwriting; the telegrams were addressed to Adel., urgently demanding the address of her vanished mistress.

In the meantime her master had given up his courtship, and returned to Berlin. He had advertised in the papers, and came every day to see if there was any answer. He sat in his old place and drank his tea as usual, afterwards smoking cigarettes till it was time to go back to the office.

Had she mentioned Konrad? What did the *gnädige Frau* take her for? Adele hoped she understood better than that how to look after her mistress's interests. And now the best thing for the *gnädige Frau* to do was to come back and act just as if nothing at all had happened. That is what her former ladies had always done.

Lilly asked her to fetch down the smaller of her two leather trunks from the attic, explaining that she wished to take away with her a few things which had belonged to her before. As Adele sullenly obeyed, Lilly collected Konrad's letters from their secret hiding-place, then ran to her big wardrobe, snatched the dresses from the pegs, and piled them on the bed to choose what she would take.

It was now that she thought of "The Song of Songs." She went down on her knees before the *escritoire*. The roll of music, which had been lying for years at the back of the bottom drawer neglected and forlorn, had assumed a different aspect. The elastic band that held the sheets together had become slack and sticky, and fell to pieces when Lilly touched it. The crumpled sheets slipped out of her hand and fluttered over the carpet. There they lay—the arias, the recita-

tions, the duets, and the connecting orchestral passages—all in confusion, and on the top the "Turtle Dove" solo for the clarionet, which she had hummed with her mother almost before she could lisp. Dismayed, she gazed at the scattered sheets. They had turned yellow and musty. Several were stained with her own blood, which had flown from her veins after her mother's assault on her with the bread-knife. The blood-stains entirely obliterated many of the notes. Others had been gnawed away with the paper by mice at Schloss Lischnitz. And this was what it had come to, her "Song of Songs."

It held out no message of hope now; it was no refuge for the future. No faithful Eckart, no guide to dizzy golden heights. It was a mere derelict, used up though never used, a time-honoured bit of lumber that one drags about without knowing why—an extinguished light, a masterpiece of wisdom that had become meaningless.

Shrugging her shoulders, she hastily gathered together the disarranged rolls of paper and tried to thrust one inside the other, regardless of how they came—she was in such a hurry!

"I can arrange them some time later," she thought, dimly conscious that she would never take the trouble.

Adele came with the box. She seemed to have been a remarkably long time getting it. Her eyes kept wandering guiltily to the clock, and her answers were absent-minded. Then she threw back the lid, and Lilly threw the score into the bottom of the box. Its yawning depths seemed to cry out for further booty. There lay the dresses spread out on the bed. Her row of shoes stood by the washstand. Hats, blouses, veils, lace wraps, silk petticoats—all were waiting as much as to say, "Take us too!"

For a moment she closed her eyes with a moan, remembering the one and only sacrifice he had asked of her. But it must be done—both their futures depended on it.

"Frau Laue will hide them for me, and afterwards Frau Laue can keep them," she thought.

Then, with a rapid resolve, she made a dash at the clothes, and gathered up blindly anything and everything she could lay hands on. She seized even the gold-coroneted ivory brushes, the three-winged hand-mirror, the bromide, the recipe for the summer storage of her furs, and a dozen other little indispensable articles of the toilette.

And jewels were not forgotten ! " *He* may want money later," she thought.

Meanwhile Adele had been sent out for a four-wheeler, and again it was ages before she came back. The porter helped to carry down the trunk, and Adele held the hat-boxes in her free hand. One last caress of the bullfinch's grey-green wings, a kiss on the small monkey's velvety snout, and the door closed behind her for ever.

" Will not the *gnädige Frau* leave an address ? " Adele inquired. How sly she looked !

" Later on I will write to you, dear Adele, and I hope you may come and live with me again."

" Dear Adele " did not respond, but glanced down the street expectantly.

A few minutes afterwards, as Lilly drove along the canal, she saw from the cab window a smart yellow-striped hired motor whiz past from the opposite direction. Richard was inside. She recognised him as he flashed by. Red as a lobster, his head slanting, he stared past her, with wild and searching glances, at the house that she had just left.

She hurriedly directed her driver to turn into a side street, for she had no desire to meet him till her fate with regard to the world had been decided. But in a few minutes she heard, with a beating heart, the same clatter of wheels that had died away in the distance coming behind her, and drawing nearer and nearer. The yellow side of the motor had almost shot beyond her, when the word " Stop ! " brought it to a standstill, and at the same moment her cab drew up too.

Richard confronted her with his hand on the door-handle : " Where are you going ? "

His voice rose to a feminine shrillness. Above his high starched collar his throat worked up and down convulsively.

She felt perfectly calm and mistress of the situation.

He appeared to her now a poor, helpless shadow of a creature, he who so long had been her lord and master.

" Please let me drive on, Richard," she said. " I have said good-bye to you by letter. I wanted a few things, and have been to fetch them. Why should we annoy each other further ? "

" Turn round ! " he said, grinding his teeth. " Turn round ! "

" Why should I turn round ? "

"I say you shall! You know where your home is. I will not allow you to knock about the world by yourself any longer. God knows what mayn't happen to you. Driver, turn round!"

The driver, with his red face, looked inquiringly at his fare before obeying.

"Really, Richard, I alone have the control of this cab, and of my future proceedings—as you have control of yours."

"What rot! If you are thinking about the American heiress, she may go to the deuce for all I care. But *you*—*you must* come back. You must! you shall!"

He grasped with both hands the hem of her skirt as if he would drag her out of the cab by her clothes.

"I beg you to come back. . . . I can't sleep, I can't work. . . . I have got so used to you. . . . If it had come off, I should have joined you again directly the wedding was over. And everything in your rooms is as you left it—that you have seen for yourself. Peterle won't eat, Adele says, and Adele is moped. She says she simply can't exist without you. I'll give you twenty thousand—no, thirty thousand—marks a year for life. Mother won't mind. . . . She understands . . . for, you know, I've given up the idea of marrying for good; that need never worry you again. . . . And you may come to the office when you like. . . . And you shall have the carriage instead of a hired one. I'll have the telephone put on between your flat and the stable. Or perhaps you'd prefer a motor-car? If so, you shall have one. ten thousand times better than this."

He had played his trump-card. What dreams of earthly grandeur could exceed a motor-car? He paused and, kneeling on the step, stared hard into her face to see the effect of his speech.

She saw clearly that she would never be free of him unless she told him the truth. She was sorry for him, but it was her duty.

"Look here, Richard. All that you offer me is no good to me now, for I love another man who can give me far more than you can—far, far more!"

"What! What! You've caught a young Vanderbilt?" he exclaimed in jealous rage. "Well, I must say I never suspected that side to your character."

"No, dear Richard; it's not a young Vanderbilt. On the

contrary, he is so poor that he lives from hand to mouth. But, all the same, he and I are engaged, and as his future wife I must ask you to leave me free to do as I like."

His jaw dropped, his eyes grew round; he reeled back against the hind wheel of the yellow car.

"Drive on!" called Lilly to the cabman.

She leaned back in her corner with a sigh of relief, and yet with a slight sense of guilt at having got rid so lightly of the old love.

The whole way she heard the puffing of a slowly progressing motor behind her, and when she descended from the cab, Richard got out of his motor at a little distance, but near enough for her to see an expression in his eyes like that of a whipped dog.

She ran up the four flights of stairs as if pursued by furies, forgetting all about her box. A moment afterwards the cabman came up, panting under its weight, and when she offered him his fare he declined to take the money.

"The gentleman downstairs," he said, "has already settled everything."

## CHAPTER XX

IT was the evening of the next day. The carriage, which was bearing Lilly to the most dreaded interview of her life, drew up at the door of the Unter den Linden Restaurant, which had been a favourite haunt of the *beau-monde* for generations. Although Lilly had not been there for a long time, she knew every inch of it. She knew, too, the giant commissionaire, Albert, who stood at the entrance and laid his hand respectfully on his braided cap. It was he who of old used to apprise her of the approach of the handsome officer of Hussars. With downcast eyes and her head pressed against Konrad's shoulder, she glided past him, trusting that he no longer remembered her.

"Uncle, this is Lilly!"

An old gentleman below middle height, with bow legs, and in an ill-fitting lounge-jacket and limp collar, came swaggering out of a private room and held out to her a broad fleshy hand, the skin of which was as loose and brown as a dog-skin glove. She cast a shy, scrutinising glance at this all-powerful person, whom she had pictured as a man of commanding presence and iron will, and who, after all, was only a shaky, corpulent, rather common-looking dwarf.

Then, as she told herself that her own and Konrad's happiness depended on her conduct now and during the next hour or two, she felt the old paralysing nervousness which had not troubled her much of late years come over her. When suffering from these attacks she became as wooden as a doll, and could do nothing but smile inanely, and hardly knew how to pronounce her own name.

The old uncle, too, seemed frozen into silence at the first sight of her. He scanned her from head to foot, and from foot to head, and nearly forgot to invite her into the private room.

This room, with its gold Japanese wall-paper, its carnation silk hangings, its blue Persian rugs, and high-backed sofa, was as familiar to her as everything else in the place. Many a festive midnight hour had she caroused away here with Richard and his chance acquaintances at the time when it was still his ambition to hobnob with the *crème de la crème* of fast society.

An immaculately shaved waiter took her brocaded evening coat and lace scarf, and measured her as he did so with an eye that seemed to say, "Surely I must have seen *you* before?"

That was an agonising moment.

The old uncle, who had never ceased to regard her stealthily with awed but grim glances, pulled himself together and said:

"Well, now we are going to have a jolly time together, children . . . cosy and friendly—eh? Jolly cosy."

Lilly bowed.

Her bow was a stiff enough inclination of the head, apparently, to increase the bandy-legged old gentleman's reverent esteem for her. He seemed puzzled and ill at ease, trampled restlessly about the room, toyed with the gold charms that dangled from his watch-chain, and nodded two or three times at Konrad in solemn appreciation.

Then they seated themselves at the gleaming white table, which was a mass of glittering cut-glass and flowers. Round the bronze lamp, with its claws and dainty iris stem—Lilly remembered it well—hung a festoon of lilac orchids, which must have cost an immense sum. Evidently this slovenly old rascal understood the art of good living.

Lilly saw herself reflected in a mirror as she sat in her place on the sofa, a radiant picture of composure and distinction. She had chosen a sunray pleated black Liberty silk dress with a bodice of Chantilly lace, which, despite its costliness, clung in the simplest lines gracefully about her neck and shoulders. An innocent masculine mind might easily believe that such a costume could be bought anywhere between San Francisco and St. Petersburg, or Cape Town and Christiania, for two hundred marks.

She had wisely left her jewellery at home. Only the slender gold chain, which she generally wore with a low bodice, encircled in maidenly unpretentiousness her high transparent collar.

She looked like a strictly reared young gentlewoman of quality making her first *début* in the great world, full of shyness and curiosity.

Konrad occupied the chair on her right. The third place, nearest the door, his uncle had retained for himself.

From the moment he sat down to table he seemed to be in his element. He growled and issued orders, and found fault with everything.

"Look here, my boy," he said to the waiter as he placed the *hors d'œuvres* in front of him, "do you call that the correct decanter for port wine? Don't you know that if port wine doesn't sparkle in the decanter it assuages thirst?"

Intimidated by his bullying tone, the waiter was going off for another decanter, but Konrad's uncle declared he couldn't spare the time, he must have a "starter" straight away.

"I am still feeling a little stiff," he said apologetically. "I am unaccustomed to entertaining such very beautiful and at the same time stand-offish ladies."

Lilly felt a stab at her heart.

Her lover's eyes met hers with a glance full of reproach and encouragement which said: "You mustn't be so silent. You must try to be nice to him." And in the same mute language she answered humbly and deprecatingly: "I cannot; *you* talk for both of us."

And then he began in his anxiety to converse as if he had been paid to entertain the company. He described the antiques which his uncle had collected in his castle on the Rhine, referred to threatened American competition, passed on to Italy and the evils of the *Lex Pacca*—goodness only knew what topic he didn't touch on.

It was quite an illuminating little discourse, which his uncle appeared to follow with modified interest, as he squinted across at Lilly and smacked his lips while he let morsels of tunny in oil slip down his throat.

Suddenly he said, "All very well, my son. Highly instructive and proper. But I wonder if you could not be equally enlightening on the subject of what sort of whisky they provide here?"

Konrad sprang up to look for the bell, but his uncle pulled him back.

"Stop! stop! This is my private entertainment. The port wine is for you. And a beautiful woman, after all, is a



beautiful woman, even when she is someone else's beautiful wife. So here's to the health of our beauty."

That sounded very like sarcasm. Was it his intention to make game of her before finally rejecting her claims?

"Permit me," he continued, "to give you my congratulations. You have worked wonders already with the boy. . . . He dances prettily to your piping—eh?"

Now she was bound to make some answer.

"I don't pipe and he doesn't dance," she said, with an effort. "We are neither of us light-hearted enough for that."

"Ah, that's a nasty one for me," he laughed; but his laugh sounded cross and irritable.

"Lilly meant no harm," interposed Konrad, coming to her rescue. "And certainly the time of stress that we are passing through at present is not easy. If it were not for the help she gives me daily with her understanding and kindness of heart, I am not sure that I could struggle on."

"Very good, very good," he replied; "or perhaps I should say, very pitiable. But your old uncle hasn't had as much as one pretty look or speech from her yet as a seal of our future relationship."

"Oh, that's what he wants, is it?" thought Lilly; and she raised her glass to his, and sought to mollify him with a coquettish little shamefaced smile.

It filled him with evident satisfaction. He twirled his pointed beard, and ogled her familiarly with his twinkling eyes, as if he wished to elicit a sign of secret understanding betwixt them.

"Thank God, perhaps he's not so very formidable after all!" she thought, and gave a sigh of deep relief that the ice was broken at last.

When the waiter came back, a lively discussion ensued between him and Konrad's uncle as to the brands of whisky the hotel boasted. . . . The debate ended in the manager of the establishment appearing on the scene, and offering to go down into the cellar himself to search for a bottle, which he thought he had somewhere, bearing the label of a certain celebrated firm, and the date of a certain famous year.

Not till this important matter was settled did the old gentleman again devote his attention to his fair future niece-in-law.

"I am an old mud-lark," he said. "I have done business in guano, train oil, Australian pitch, ship grease, and other such

unclean things. So you can't wonder at my wishing to refresh myself for once in a way with an appetising object like yourself, dear ungracious lady. All I require is a little return of my interest."

"Ah well, then, I'll just be impudent," thought Lilly. And aloud she said: "You know, Herr Rennschmidt, I am sitting here trembling in my shoes like a poor, unlucky candidate for an examination! I implore you"—she raised her clasped hands towards him—"don't play cat-and-mouse with me."

Now she had struck the right note and given him the opening he desired.

"Her lips are unsealed at last!" he exclaimed, beaming. "And I say, Konrad, what pretty lips she has! I like those long teeth that make the upper lip say to the lower, 'If you won't kiss when I do, I'll have a separation.' Do you see what I mean, Konrad, you dullard?"

Lilly could not help laughing heartily, and at once they were on the best of terms. Even Konrad's dear, haggard face lighted up for a moment with a reassuring smile which did her heart good. For his sake she could almost have thrown herself under his uncle's feet, so dearly did she love him. And with a feeling of rising triumph she thought, "I'll just show him how awfully nice I can be to the old curmudgeon."

It was not so difficult, after all. When she looked at his round, puckered, mischievous old face, with the keen shrewd grey eyes and the beautifully waved snow-white wig—it was actually a wig peaked on the forehead and brushed into two outstanding curls over his ears like a judge's—she felt more and more that he was a good and tried comrade, with whom she had often had good times in the past. And yet she had certainly never met him before.

He had a masterful air of breeding about him, despite his plebeian exterior. His choice of the menu was simply admirable. The 'sixty-eight Steinbeiger, which flowed into the crystal glasses like liquid amber, suited the blue trout to such perfection that it might have been their native element; and the sweet-bread patties *à la Montgelas* were worthy accompaniments. Neither Richard nor any of his crew understood so well the gourmet's art.

If only he had not drunk whisky so perpetually in between!

"My brain has been so deadened by money-making," he

said in justification, "I am obliged to give it a fillip now and then, or it would become completely dulled."

With the punch *à la romaine*, a brief and vivacious debate arose as to the merits of certain American drinks, in which Lilly, with her extensive knowledge of bars and beverages, scored. She even knew the exact ingredients of her host's speciality, the "South Sea Bowl," in which sherry, cognac, angostura bitters, with the yolks of eggs and Château d'Yquem, or, if necessary, moselle, contributed to make a fiery mixture. She went so far as to offer to prepare this curious mixture for him after dinner with the skill of an expert, so that he would have to confess he had never drunk anything more delicious between Singapore and Melbourne.

Konrad, who obviously had never suspected her genius in this direction, listened to her with an amazement that filled her with pride. She telegraphed to him one secret signal after the other, asking, "Aren't you pleased? Am I not being very, very nice to him?"

But somehow he would not respond. He was silent and absent-minded, and it often seemed as if he did not belong to the party.

"Well, he may dream if he likes," she thought blissfully. "I'll look after our interests."

Thus every minute the friendship between her and the old worldling grew apace.

By the time they had got to the wild-duck and the dark glowing burgundy, which slid down their throats like warm caresses, she had already begun to call him "dear uncle." He, on his side, declared over and over again that he was "totally wrapped up in his dear, dear little Lilly."

So this was the test, the cruel probation, which she had dreaded with all her soul, through which she had expected to come dissected and unmasked, with every rag of concealment rudely torn off!

When she thought of how differently things were turning out, she could hardly contain herself for glee. There sat the mighty, dreaded peril, whose money-bags meant victory or defeat, a little wild beast tamed, who squeezed her fingers in his repulsive shrivelled hands and fawned on her for a smile.

He was undoubtedly quite amusing, especially when he told good stories.

What a lot of scandal he had gathered in the Colonies! In

one evening he told more anecdotes than she had heard for a year. There was, for example, the story of the German Governor, Herr von So-and-So—she had once met him herself at Uhl's—who took up his duties abroad with a suite consisting of secretary, valet, and cook. In six months the cook came and said, "Herr Governör, I am——" He gave her two thousand marks and said, "Here you are, but keep quiet." Then she went to the secretary and said, "Herr Müller, I am——" He gave her three hundred marks and said, "Not a word." Then she went to the valet and said, "Johann, I'm so far gone, we'd better marry." After three months the valet came to the Governor and said, "Your Excellency, the hussy took us all in. The child is black!" And many another yarn followed of the same sort. In short, she nearly died of laughing.

"Konrad, why don't you laugh? Laugh, dearest."

And then he really did smile, but his eyes remained grave and his brow tense.

When the champagne came, they drank each other's health again, and kissed. The touch of those thick sensual old lips was horrible, but to ensure her future happiness it had to be endured. She was going to give Konrad a kiss too, but he declined it. Still worse, he tried to prevent her drinking so much.

"She ought to be more careful," he urged. "Please, uncle, don't fill up her glass so often. We never drink so much as this."

The other two laughed at him.

"He always was a bit of a muff," jeered his old uncle, "and never knew what was good. He's not good enough for you, Lilly; you ought to have a fellow like me—not a prig. He's like a mute at a funeral."

But she saw no joke in this.

"You shan't abuse my darling Konni, you old wretch! Go on telling your old chestnuts. *Allons!* Fire away!"

No, not a word should be breathed against her dear, sweet Konni!

So uncle started telling good stories again. This time he related them in pigeon-English, that gibberish which the Chinese and other interesting inhabitants of the far East use as a medium of communication with the white sahibs. "Tom and Paddy in the Tea-house"; "The virtuous spinster Miss

Laura " ; " The Guide and the Bayadere." Each was received with a box of the ears.

" But we mustn't let Konni hear any more, uncle dear. Konni might be corrupted."

So saying, she inclined her left ear very close to dear uncle's lips, and made with her hollowed hand between them a " whispering-tube," which was the custom of " the crew " when any of them wanted to flirt unheard, or do anything else particularly outrageous.

It would be a sad mistake to suppose that she was in the least abashed or unequal to giving as good as she got. The general's " lullabies " were spicy enough, and she had learned from " the crew " much that was of unquestionable origin and questionable taste. For such an appreciative audience as uncle proved to be, it was worth while doing one's best. But the innocent Konrad had to submit to his ears being stuffed up with the wadding on which the Colville apples had been served.

After the coffee, uncle challenged her to keep her promise about brewing the South Sea Bowl, her vaunted knowledge of which, of course, had been mere brag.

She would show him ! He shouldn't scoff at her a second time. A variety of bottles were brought ; besides the sherry and the angostura, an old, sweet liqueur. It was a pity, uncle thought, to mix such good things, and he took two or three glasses of the latter neat, and she followed his example.

The tiresome eggs broke at the wrong place, it was true, and emptied their contents on her dress and the carpet. But what did that matter ? It merely increased the fun . . . and dear old uncle was paying for everything. To make up for the eggs smashing, the blue flame of the alcohol-lamp leapt up merrily as high as the orchids, as high as the ceiling. . . . She would have loved to lick up the flames, as the witches did.

" Your luck, Konni !—*our* luck, Konni ! "

" Don't drink it," she heard him say, and his voice sounded harder than usual. Indeed, she hardly recognised it as his voice at all.

" Muff ! " she laughed, and thrust out her tongue at him. " Muff ! "

" Don't drink it ! " the warning voice said again. " You are not used to it."

*She* not used to drinking! How dared he say so? This was an insult to her honour; yes, an insult to her honour.

"How do you know what I am used to? I am used to plenty of things you don't guess. . . . Here, on this seat where I am sitting now, I have sat more than once—more than ten times—and have drunk ten times more."

"Dearest heart, you don't know what you are saying. It isn't true."

Once more his voice sounded gentle and soothing, as if he were reproving a naughty child.

"How dare you say it isn't true? Do you take me for an impostor? I suppose you think I am not at home in swell places like this! . . . Pooh! Shall I give you a proof? I can—I can! . . . You'll find my name scratched at the foot of this lamp. Look and you'll find it. . . . 'Lilly Czepanek . . . Lilly Czepanek.' Look! Look, I say!"

He had started to his feet, his face rigid, and fixed his eyes in horror on the polished silver mirror of the lamp, on which was a jumble of scribbled hieroglyphics. He could not distinguish amongst them the L. C. for which he was looking till she came to his assistance. Here, no; there, no. The letters swam into one another. It was like trying to catch hold of the goldfish in the aquarium.

Hurrah! here it was. That was it—"L. v. M." and the coronet above. For in those days she had often had the audacity to call herself by the forbidden title as a temporary adornment.

"Now, do you see, Konni, that I was right? Now you won't mind how much I drink, will you, you dear, precious little muff?"

Utterly crushed by the proof, he sank back in his chair without a single word.

His uncle and Lilly went on drinking and laughing at him.

At this moment she happened to catch sight of herself in the glass. Through a billowy haze she beheld a flushed, puffy face with dishevelled hair falling about it from under a crooked hat, and two deeply marked lines running from mouth to chin. It was not a pleasing spectacle, and she was a little disturbed at it; but before she could distress

herself further, the old uncle claimed her attention with a new joke.

"Do you know, Lilly dear, how the Chinese sing 'Die Lorelei'?"

Before she had heard a syllable she went into a fit of giggles. He crossed his bandy legs and played a prelude on the side of his foot as if it were a banjo, "Ping, pang, ping"; and then he began in a cracked, nasal, gurgling voice, drawling his "l's."

"O, my belong too much sorry  
And can me no savy, what kind;  
Have got one olo piccy story,  
No won't she go outside my mind."

When he came to the second verse:

"Dat night belong dark and colo"

he heightened the effect by tearing the wig from his head, and now he looked for all the world like an old nodding mandarin, with his slits of eyes and his polished bare ivory skull.

It was fascinatingly and overwhelmingly funny. Never in her life had she seen such a mirth-provoking, side-splitting piece of clowning. You could have died of envy if you hadn't been Lilly Czepekanek, the renowned mimic and impersonator, who, when the spirit moved her, had only to open her lips to rouse a tornado of applause.

Her incomparable *repertoire* had been growing rusty for too long. "La belle Otéro" was not yet stale, and Tortajada was dancing her ravishing dances, while Matchiche was just becoming the rage.

All you had to do was to tilt your hat a little further back, to raise your black skirt—the *dessous* was part of what had been brought away yesterday, and would not have disgraced a Saharet—and then you were off!

And she was off! Off like a whirlwind over the carpet, slippery with the yolks of eggs that she had spilt. Hop, skip—olé! olé! Yes, you must shout "Olé!" and clap your hands. "Olé-é-é—"

Dear uncle bawled; the floor rocked in great waves. . . . Lamps and mirrors danced with her. All hell seemed to be let loose.

"Konni, why don't you shout 'Olé' ? . . . Don't be so down . . . Olé !"

"Uncle, you will have this on your conscience !"

What did he mean by saying that ? Why was he sobbing ?  
Why did he stand there as white as the tablecloth ?

"Olé—ol-é-é-é !"



## CHAPTER XXI

TOWARDS noon Lilly awoke in a rapture of joy.

The formidable uncle had been won—the last obstacle cleared from her path—the future lay spread out at her feet like a land of milk and honey. The probation looked forward to with such anxiety and terror had turned out, after all, only a delightful spree. What a mountebank and buffoon that shrewd old man of the world was, who probably had ground women's hearts under his heel as indifferently as he crunched walnuts. When she tried, however, to review the events of the previous evening she felt a slight dismay at nothing emerging from her blurred memory but the sounds of song and uproarious laughter, just as it used to be in that other life when she had spent the night in mad revels with Richard and his friends.

As the mist lifted a little, she saw a deadly white face petrified by pained surprise, heard an exclamation that was half a sob and half a groan, and saw herself, sobbing too, kneeling before someone who pushed her away with his hands.

Had that happened, or had she dreamed it?

And she had danced and sung so beautifully! She had exhibited her art at its best. Could there have been anything displeasing in it? Had she, perhaps, gone a little too far in her high spirits?

Her anxiety grew. She sprang out of bed, and her one thought was that she must go to him instantly.

At twelve the bell rang.

That was Konrad; it must be Konrad. But, when she flew to the lobby door to throw herself into his arms with a cry of joy and relief, she found that she was standing face to face with his uncle, who stood twirling his hat in his

horrid fingers, and looked at her with a significant smile that she did not like at all.

"Is it to come all over again—the probation," she thought, "or is it now only coming off for the first time?"

"How do you do?" died in her throat. She let him in without speaking. A sensation of faintness came over her, as if she were going to fall backwards through the wall into her room.

It was the old man who opened the door and walked in, with the air of an acquaintance who knew his way about.

"Where is Konrad?"

"Konrad?" he repeated, and scratched the silk band of his wig with his little finger. "I've something to say about Konrad."

He drew out his glittering watch, with its massive chain, and studied the hands.

"I make it just ten minutes past twelve. By now he will be on his way to the station—most probably he has started."

"Is he . . . going away?" she stammered, while her breath began to fail her.

"Yes, yes. He is going away. . . . We settled that last night. . . . He needs a change."

"It's nonsense," she thought; "how can he go away for a change without me?"

But she put a restraint on herself and asked casually, "Where is he thinking of going so suddenly?"

"Oh! he's taking a little trip abroad hardly worth speaking about. It seemed a favourable opportunity. A double cabin was going begging on the steamer leaving—er—never mind where! . . . an outside cabin, you know; on the promenade deck; pleasantest position, you know; no splashing, and lots of air. . . . One wants plenty of air, especially during those four days in the Red Sea."

Then she was right. Her suspicions that the probation of her character and intentions was only to begin seriously now were being verified.

"What takes people to the Red Sea, uncle dear?" she asked, with her most ingenuous smile.

"Yes, what takes them to the Red Sea? Four thousand years ago the ancient Jews asked the same question, and every-one asks it to-day when he finds himself sweltering there.

But still, if you want to go to India, you must pass through the Red Sea. . . . And I want to go to India once more. I've been quite long enough trotting about the pavements at home. And as our Konrad is overworked—you'll admit he is, child—I have talked him into coming to travel with me a bit. For in cases like this I believe change of scene is the best remedy. Do you see?"

Lilly felt a lump rise in her throat as if all the links of his gold watch-chain were choking her.

"This joke isn't in the best of taste," she thought; "and God knows what he means by it."

But whether she liked it or not, she had to play at the game. "Konrad might have had the grace to come and say good-bye to me prettily," she replied, pouting a little, as if a journey to Potsdam or Dresden was in question.

"Well, you see, child, that's what *he* wanted to do, of course. But I said to him, 'Look here, my boy, farewells are far too exciting and unnerving, and may bring on apoplexy.' He agreed, and left it to me to put matters straight with you."

"Well, by all means let us put matters straight," she answered, with the patronising smile that such a farce merited.

"I shouldn't be surprised," she thought, "if he were not waiting outside in the cab for a signal to come in."

"Uncle" placed his smart panama hat beside him on the floor, leaned his short body back in Frau Laue's red plush arm-chair, and affected an expression of distress and sympathy.

What an old clown he was! It mystified her more than anything that he seemed so absolutely to have forgotten the alliance they had entered into on the previous evening. But perhaps this was only part of the probation farce.

"If it were only a question of me, my dear," he went on, "it wouldn't matter. I honestly confess I'm mad about you—'wrapped up,' as I said last night. I have met women-folk in all parts of the globe, and it's as clear to me as palm-oil that you are made of the choicest materials it's possible to find. But there are people, you know, who take life seriously and cherish grand illusions. . . . people who have no notion that a human being must be a human being. They think they are something extra, and expect life to afford them extra titbits. And then come disappointments, of course . . . reproaches, despair . . . tearing of hair,

wringing of hands. I'm blowed if he didn't try to thrash me last night!"

"Whom are you talking about?" asked Lilly, becoming every moment more uneasy.

"Just as if I had led you on into the little overshooting of the mark! No, no . . . that's not my way. I don't lay man-traps. And so I told him ten times over. The misfortune is, that you and I understood each other too well. You and I are in the same line of business. . . . We two are like two old colleagues."

"We two . . . ? You and I?" gasped Lilly in frigid amazement.

"Yes, you and I, my dear child. Don't have a fit—you and I; you and I. It's true that you are a splendid beauty of twenty-five, and I am a damned old fool of sixty. . . . But life has tarred us with the same brush. How am I to explain it to you? . . . Have you ever hunted for diamonds? I don't mean at the jeweller's. I'll lay a wager you know that way of hunting them. Well, a diamond lies embedded in hard rock, in tunnels . . . so-called blue ground. If you find a blue-ground tunnel, you may imagine what it is; you just sit in it. Once I went diamond-hunting with a party of twenty, day and night, week after week. The blue ground was there all right, but the diamonds had been washed out of it. Do you follow me? The fine ground is still in both of us; but what made it fine the devil has in the meantime walked off with."

"Why do you tell me all this?" Lilly asked. Tears of bewilderment sprang to her eyes, for this couldn't possibly have anything to do with the probation.

"Now, child, I'll tell you why. . . . There are people who when they have given their word think there is no going back on it. They must swallow whatever they've put in their mouths, even if it's a strychnine pill. . . . My opinion, on the contrary, is that no one ought deliberately to plunge into misfortune—neither he nor you. And since the quickest method is to wash the wool while it's on the sheep, I've come to you to make a little proposition. See, here's a cheque-book. You know what cheque-books are, I expect. On the right side are printed figures from five hundred upwards. All the figures that make the amount bigger than the sum inscribed on the cheque are cut off, in case a little swindler

should take it into his head with one little stroke of the pen to cheat one out of a little hundred thousand. Well now, look here. This cheque is signed and dated ; the figures alone want to be filled in. I should never permit myself to offer you a certain sum, but I should like you to say what you think would be a decent provision for your future."

He tore the cheque out and laid it on the table in front of her.

"Thank Heaven," thought Lilly, "I had nothing to be afraid of! My heart need not have misgiven me."

Who could be so blind as not to see through this clumsy trick whereby he intended to put to the test her unselfishness about money? So she did not send the old man about his business, as she might with justice have done, if such a proposal had been made to her seriously, but she took the cheque off the table, smiling, tore it carefully to atoms, and flipped them one after the other into his face.

He fidgeted about in his arm-chair.

"Allow me," he said ; "please allow me . . . ."

"No! Such scurvy little jokes I certainly will not allow, dear uncle," she replied.

"But you are declining a fortune, my child. Think what you are doing. We've upset the tenor of your life. We have, as it were, cast you on the gutter. That you shan't perish there is our responsibility. And if you think you will lower yourself in his eyes by accepting, I can swear to you he knows nothing about it ; and never will, I'll swear too."

She only smiled.

His small slits of eyes grew bright and hard. Suddenly they began to threaten her.

"Or . . . is it your intention not to give up the good boy—to hang his promise like a halter about his neck? . . . Are you one of that kind, eh?"

"No. I am not one of that kind."

Her smile reached far beyond him. It flew to greet the beloved who soon, very soon now, would be ascending the stairs ; for surely he couldn't have patience to wait there outside in the cab much longer.

"His promise is his own. He's never given it. And if he had wanted to I would never have let him. And even if what you said just now was true, he might go away if he liked, and come back again, and I would not write to him or meet

him, or remind him in any way of what he is and always will be to me as long as I live. But I know that it is *not* true. He loves me, and I love him. And take care, uncle, not to play so low down with his future wife as to offer her blank cheques and such disgraceful proposals. If I were to tell him, you would find yourself all at once a lonely old man whose fortune might go to endow a home for lost dogs."

He was obliged to see at last what a blunder he had committed. He jumped from his seat, evidently annoyed at his mistake, and ejaculated an irritable "Bah!" as he began to pace the room, jingling the charms on his watch-chain. Once or twice he murmured something that sounded like "A hangman's job." But she couldn't have heard right.

At last he seemed to arrive at a decision. He stopped close in front of her, laid his repulsive hands on her shoulders and said, suddenly becoming affectionate and familiar again :

"Listen, sweetheart, girlie, pretty one. Something has to be done. We can't shirk the point. There must be a conclusion. If only I weren't such a damned mangy old hound and hadn't to consider the dear boy's feelings in the matter, things would be simple enough. I should merely say, 'Come along with me to the nearest registry-office. But hurry up ; I haven't time to waste !' Don't stare ! Yes—me. I'd ask you to marry *me*. You wouldn't have reason to regret it. But Konrad—you must see yourself it won't do—won't do. It would be a fatal mistake from beginning to end. He is a rising man. He wants to climb to the top ; he is still blessed with faith, and you haven't any left. You fell too early into the great sausage-machine which minces us all sooner or later into average meat. . . . You wouldn't be happy with him long. You couldn't keep up to him. You'd drag on him like a dead weight, and would always be conscious of it. As for last night's revelation, which opened his eyes, I don't lay so much stress on that. It's not a question of what the coast-line looks like—sand or palms, it's all the same—but it's the interior that counts. And there I see waste land, burnt-up scorched deserts ; no birds flying across it ; no ground in which confidence can strike root. Child, creep into any shelter life offers you, cling to those who have brought you to this pass ; but let the boy go. He is not made for you. Be honest ; haven't you long ago said so yourself ? "

Ah, so this was what he meant ! It was not a probation, but the end—the end !

She gazed into vacancy. She seemed to hear steps growing fainter ; one after the other they slowly died away, like *his* footsteps when at break of day he had softly stolen downstairs.

But this was final. They had died away for ever.

A dull sense of disappointment gnawed at her heart. That was all. The worst would come later, as she knew by experience

And then she saw a vision of herself dancing and yelling, laughing at foul jests, with her hat awry and her skirts held high—a drunken wanton ! She, the “lofty-minded saint” with the “brow divine,” a drunken wanton—nothing more and nothing less.

Now she knew why he had stood there with his face as white as the tablecloth—why that sobbing groan of pain had burst from his lips. And it was pity for him as much as shame of herself that made of this moment a boiling hell.

“How is he bearing it ?” she asked, stammering.

“You can guess how,” he replied, “but I believe I shall pull him through”

“Oh, uncle . . . I . . . didn’t . . . I didn’t want to do it . . .” she cried, sobbing.

“I know, child ; I know. He told me all.”

For an instant her wounded pride flamed up within her. She stooped, and gathering together a handful of the bits of torn paper, she held them out to him on her open palm

“And you dared to offer me *that* ?”

“What was I to do, my dear ? And what am I to do with you now ?”

“Pah !” and she struck at him with both hands, but the next moment she threw her arms round his neck and wept on his shoulder. Perhaps her cheek touched the very place which Konrad last night might have wetted with his tears !

He began to reason with her again. He made suggestions for her future. He would help her to begin a new life, and provide her with the means to cultivate her brilliant histrionic talents ; she should come out on the stage or the concert platform. But she shook her head.

“Too late, uncle. . . . Waste land—didn’t you say so yourself ?—ground where no confidence can take root. I

might aspire to be a music-hall star, but honestly I don't think it would pay."

"Cursed hounds!" he growled.

"Who are cursed hounds?"

"You know well enough, my child."

She reflected a moment as to whom he could mean. Then she said:

"There was only one . . . no, two, and then afterwards one more . . . and then two more who didn't count."

"Well, that seems to me to be plenty, dear."

He patted her cheeks and smiled kindly, and somehow she did not find his fingers repulsive any more.

She felt that she must smile too, though she began crying again directly.

Konrad's uncle prepared to take his departure, and she clung on tightly to his shoulder. She couldn't bear to let him go. He was the last link with her vanished dream of happiness.

"What message shall I take him?" he asked.

She drew herself erect. Her eyes widened. She wanted to pour out the full flood of her grief. Her shattered and squandered love sought for winged words which should bear it to him, sanctified and hallowed anew. But no words came.

She looked wildly round the room, as if from some quarter of it help must come. The portraits of defunct actors smiled down on her; once so eloquent, they were dumb now—dumb as her own frozen soul. The specimen lamp-shade in its frame greeted her, presaging a future to be passed at Frau Laue's side.

"I have nothing to say," she faltered. Then she thought of something after all. "Ask him . . . ask him, please, why he didn't come himself to say good-bye. I know that he is not a coward."

Uncle made one of his queerest faces.

"As you have been so astoundingly sensible, little woman, I'll tell you the secret. He wanted to come and say good-bye—most dreadfully, of course. And I promised him that I'd try and bring you to the station."

In an instant she was making a dash for her straw hat.

"Stop!"



He had laid his hand on her arm. The short, squat figure seemed to grow taller.

"You won't go."

"What? Konni is expecting me, wants to speak to me? And I am not to go?"

"I say again, 'You won't go.' If you are the plucky girl I take you for, you will not spoil your work of sacrifice. For, depend upon it, if once he sees you again you'll hang on to each other for evermore."

The straw hat slipped from her hand.

"Then . . . tell him . . . I shall always love him, always and always, that he will be my last thought on earth. . . . And . . . I don't know what else to say."

He silently made his way out of the room.

And then she broke down.

## CHAPTER XXII

THE world wagged on, calmly, merrily, busily, as if nothing had happened, as if nowhere on the ocean of life a lost happiness was drifting every minute farther and farther away, as if no forsaken and abandoned human child cowered in a corner, staring with despairing eyes helplessly at the floor.

Frau Laue tapped at her lamp-shades, the fried potatoes frizzled in the fat-lined pan ; the stove in the lobby smoked, and the frowsy poor-people's odour exhaled a welcome to all who came within its radius. She did not cry her heart out of her body, as she had done after her expulsion from the castle. She neither lapsed into a dazed apathy nor wrestled desperately with fate. Instead, she felt that a grey yawning void stretched before her endlessly, the silence of which was broken now and then by a shrill cry of almost animal longing and despair, a sense of feeble submission to the inevitable, a consciousness of being incarcerated without hope of escape, a baffled slipping down into life's dark depths, a dreary death unmarked by grace or dignity.

Between to-day and to-morrow—the to-morrow that seemed to beckon from every corner—Lilly's tearless eyes saw the railings of the bridge that her feet had tested on the way home from "Rosmersholm." And, as she stared into space, she beheld the dark, purple-flecked waters rolling languidly on far below, and heard the iron chains clank under her feet.

This sound grew into a perpetual sing-song that accompanied everything she did, floated over and swallowed up everything that the eventless days brought forth. It pierced her brain, hammered in her temples, and throbbed painfully in every nerve and pore of her body.

Only one word was set to this haunting melody, and that

was "Die." Yes—die. What could be simpler? What more irresistible?

Die! not to-day; but to-morrow perhaps, or the day after. Something might happen yet. A letter might come, or *he* himself. Or if not this, who could know that fate was not holding some other miracle of good fortune up its sleeve?

So it was worth while living to-day, to drag through its countless hours of deadly monotony.

Then one evening, a week after Konrad's sudden departure, Frau Laue appeared in Lilly's room at an unaccustomed hour. Her manner denoted determination.

"Now look here, Lilly dear," she began. "Things can't go on like this. If you were crying your heart out I shouldn't say anything. But, as you are acting now, matters will never mend. There is only one sensible course that you can take; you must return to your Herr Dehnicke. If he had any inkling of how things were going with you here, trust him, he would have come and taken you away long ago. So I tell you plainly, either you sit down and write him a nice letter or I shall leave my work in the lurch and go straight off to his office to-morrow morning. He'll pay my expenses fast enough."

Lilly felt a strong impulse to turn the old woman out of the room, but she was too depressed to do more than turn away from her with impotent distaste.

"I haven't too much time to spare now," Frau Laue continued; "the dozen must be completed before bedtime. . . . But you can make your mind easy as to one thing. If he is not here by ten o'clock to-morrow, he'll be here by twelve, for I shall have gone to fetch him. Good-night, Lilly dear."

In melancholy scorn she sent a scoffing laugh after Frau Laue. This, then, was the stroke of good fortune which fate had in store for the morrow? Once more she was to cringe to man's puerile supremacy, and live in enervating servitude—vegetate amidst fleeting and unprofitable pleasures in a perfumed lethargy, or be goaded by ennui and disgust to walk the streets.

Yet, if he came the next day, she knew she would not have the power to resist. Richard would only have to look at her with that whipped-dog expression, which was something quite new for him, and the mere thought of which filled her

with a shamefaced tenderness, and she would throw her arms round his neck and have a good cry on his shoulder.

Was it worth waiting another to-morrow for that? No; better to die to-day.

To-day! A feeling of ecstasy came over her. She ran about the room, with folded hands, weeping and exulting. She would be a heroine like Isolde, a martyr for her love.

And there the railings of the bridge were waiting ready for her. How they would creak and groan when she set her feet on them!

Now the sing-song in her head was so loud that she thought it must kill her. The air resounded with a whirl of tones. The walls echoed them. The noise of the street, the capital's roar of traffic, all sang . . . "Die—die—die!"

She pulled off her evening wrapper and dressed herself to go out. At first she thought of putting on one of the badly fitting dresses because they were connected with Konrad, but her heart failed her.

"Die beautifully," Hedda Gabler had said.

"If only I had his photograph that I might take a farewell look into his eyes," she thought. But she had nothing but his letters and a few verses. They should accompany her on her last walk.

They lay at the bottom of the leather trunk, which was still concealed in Frau Lauc's box-room, though there had long been no one from whom it was necessary to conceal it. As she rummaged in its depths to find the little packet, she put her hand by accident on the roll of old music manuscript.

She looked tenderly at the yellow-stained sheet into which the rest was fitted. She was no longer vexed with her "Song of Songs," and did not despise it, as on that ill-fated morning when she had hunted it up again; the morning on which she had gone out to break her vow to Konrad.

Now once more it was a dear, precious possession, not a guide, philosopher, and friend, not a miracle-working sacred relic, but just an old keepsake which we treasure and water with our tears because it is a bit of our own life.

And a bit of our own blood!

For there were still those dark stains on the paper. Her blood had fallen on it when she set forth on life's journey, and now that the journey was ending the deep waters should wash the blood-stains away.

With the score lying in her lap, she looked beyond it into the sorrowful past. It seemed to her as if mists were lifting and curtains were being drawn aside, and she saw the path that she had trodden winding backwards at her feet, like a clearly defined boundary.

She had been weak and often stupid. Her own interests and the main chance she had never considered. Every man who had entered her life had been able to do what he liked with her. Not once had she barred her soul, shown fight, or exercised to the full the sovereignty of her beauty. She had only been eager to oblige and to love and be kind to everyone. In reward, she had been hunted and bullied and dragged through the mud all her life long. Even the one man who had respected her had gone away without saying good-bye.

"But I've never hated anybody," she thought. "And no matter what I have suffered, or how I have transgressed, I have always been able to feel there was something in me out of the common, and this at the last seems as if it had been a gift from Heaven."

Did it not really seem as if this "Song of Songs," which now lay before her, defaced, stained, and rotted, like her own career, had been all along blessing and absolving her—the presiding genius she had believed it to be as a child, and fancied it afterwards during the rapture of her abandonment to her love for Konrad?

"Yes, you shall come too," she said. "You shall die when I die."

And she carefully wrapped the battered papers together. Then she found the letters, and read them through two or three times, but without taking in what she read.

The clock struck twelve as she stepped softly out on to the landing. Frau Laue was asleep. She met no one on the stairs, and unseen walked into the street.

Since her flight to Konrad that memorable night she had not been out alone in the streets so late. Everything looked as if she saw it for the first time: the long rows of houses bathed in crude light, the trolleys of the electric trams in between, and the gliding figures of night-revellers.

A numbing terror seized her. Her legs felt wooden, as if stilts were screwed on to them, propelling her forward whether she would or not, without rest; and her heels tapped cease-

lessly on the pavement, carrying her nearer and nearer her goal. Whenever she met anyone she felt an impulse to hide herself, fancying that it would be noticed where she was going. For this reason she dived into dark back-streets, which were unevenly paved and where fading lime-trees scattered their drops of rain. She passed straggling brick buildings inhospitably shut in behind high back-garden walls; slaughter-houses and factories; and all the time her heels went tap-tap-tap, as if she had a pedometer attached to them, registering every inch which shortened her road.

She tried to remember other short-cuts to her bridge, but couldn't find them, and gave up the attempt.

"What thou doest, let it be done quickly," she had read somewhere. So she pressed forward with clenched teeth.

The Engelbecken was dark and deserted; yellow lights were reflected dimly in its unfathomable waters. "Here it would be easier," she thought, breathless from the oppression at her heart. But, shuddering, she retreated from the grass slopes. The bridge must be somewhere over there to the north-west. Fate had ordained that she should go to the bridge.

It was still a long way off, quite an hour's walk. She came into more frequented ways. The rows of lights in front of the dancing saloons, where prostitutes caroused, cast their garish beams like finger-posts into the night. Cabs were waiting there, and sounds of revelry came from within. Forwards, forwards—always forwards! Hot, garlic-laden fumes were wafted to her nostrils from a cellar-café that kept its doors open. When had she smelt something like that before? Why, of course, when Frau Redlich was cooking the sausages for her son's farewell dinner.

In front of her a hose as thick as her wrist sent a cleansing shower-bath over the street. What did that hissing, gurgling sound remind her of? Why, of course, of old Haberland watering the lawn with the old-fashioned sprinkler. And then all at once the thought shot through her brain: "None of this is really happening. I am lying in bed between the bookcases, and behind me the hanging lamp that I took down is smoking . . . and this is all in an old novel that I am reading, while Frau Asmussen has luckily gone to sleep after taking her medicine."

A growing tumult called her back to actual life. She had reached the heart of the city, the spot where the whirl of

Berlin's never-flagging nightly dissipations reaches its height. She came to the Spittelmarkt, and onwards the huge Leipziger Strasse unrolled its chain of lights like a pearl necklace. Buried in a mist of silver, dotted with the glimmering red lanterns of night cafés and cabarets, it was like a brilliant picture toned down with sepia.

The numb feeling in Lilly's legs increased. She walked, and was hardly conscious that she moved at all. She only felt the tremendous force of her heart-beats, which made her whole body vibrate like a mill.

In the Friedrichstrasse there were nearly as many people about as by day. Young men pursued their smiling quarry, and the lamplight was reflected in the silk hose of the tripping *grisettes*.

"Once submerged in this sort of world," Lilly thought with a gruesome envy, "and one is disturbed by no sense of wounded honour or suicidal impulses."

Ah! but on the other side of this bright, laughing, jostling crowd came peace and darkness again, in the shelter of which you might die unseen and unknown.

Through the noise she still heard her heels tapping. Why shouldn't she go into some café, she asked herself? Even if someone saw her, what did it matter? It would give her one miserable quarter of an hour's breathing space. Lights, mirrors, velvet seats, blue cigarette-smoke, a clink of crystal, a picking in her parched throat. Just once—once more . . . not a quarter . . . but a whole hour, and one more poor little bit of life would be hers, which could do no one else any harm. But she could find no justification for such a cowardly action, and determined that her last walk should be disgraced by no such weakness. And she went on, on and on.

The merry vortex of the Kranzlerecke was left behind; the daggers of light stabbed her no more. Lilly hardly knew where she was going. Most likely she was in one of those quiet cross-streets which led to the north-west end. The middle of the deserted street glistened with puddles. The rainy autumnal wind came sweeping along between the houses, and the cold lamplight was reflected in their dark window-panes. Everything round her here seemed lifeless and extinct; only a human phantom glided forth at intervals, and cats chased each other noiselessly into obscurity.

Lilly shivered, and clasped the score tighter in her arms.

As she tried to catch a sight of her reflection in the glass window of a florist's, the blinds of which were not drawn down, she started. There she saw stiff branches of ever-green laurels and cypresses encircling a bust of the Kaiser ; that recalled something strongly to her mind. What was it ? Ah ! of course. They reminded her of the Clytie which reigned on the pretentious private staircase of Liebert & Dehnicke's, smiling and dreaming. Lilly Czepanek would never now ascend that green-shaded stairway, either as a penitent or a triumphant sinner.

She had chosen a better way, which led more directly to the great goal.

She came to a bridge, and crossed it quickly. That other bridge, with the iron palisade, which sung her such alluring cradle-songs, was further away in the open, buried in darkness and silence.

" You overflow with a superfluity of love . . . three kinds of love : love emanating from the heart, the senses, and from compassion. One kind everybody has ; two are dangerous ; all three lead to ruin ! "

Who had said that ?

Why, to be sure, her first flame—that poor consumptive lecturer on the history of art, whom she and Rosalie Katz had clubbed together to send to the promised land, the land which she herself had never seen. He had spoken of the blue haze of the olives, of fields of shining asphodel, and the black sirocco sea.

" Fields of shining asphodel." What sort of fields could they be, fields of asphodel ?

The foreign word sounded strange, and oh, how full of enchantment ! But her heels still went tap-tap, and the cradle-song of the palisade thundered in between.

A man addressed her : " Would she . . . ? "

She shook him off as if he had been a reptile.

Then she remembered another warning that had been given her, also divided into three heads—whose was that ? Oh, now she recollected : Dr. Pieper's. It came back to her, every word and sentence of the pompous utterance sounding in her ears as clearly as if it had been spoken only yesterday, " There are three things to beware of : Exchange no superfluous glances ; demand no superfluous rendering of accounts ; make no superfluous confessions."



"If I had not exchanged superfluous glances I should have seen my promised land. If I had not superfluously demanded a rendering of account, I should never have been kicked out of Lischnitz. And if I had not made superfluous confessions . . . ."

Well, what then?

"Konni! Konni!" she wailed. A shudder of yearning overwhelmed her painfully, and restrained her wandering thoughts.

She walked on, staggering. Fresh lines of street vanished in mist, and at one spot a grass lawn reared its unevenly clipped hedge.

"What sort of fields could they be, fields of shining asphodel?"

Ah! here was the bridge. The bridge!

Like a thief in the night it loomed in the darkness, above the wide, deserted spaces, where the lights of thousands of street-lamps dwindled into infinitesimal sparks. Somewhere in the dark sky shone the mild face of a full-moon. It was the illuminated clock of a railway station, the shadowy outline of which was swallowed up by the darkness. The hands pointed to half-past one.

Lilly saw it all dimly, as through a haze. She had sunk, paralysed with terror, against the corner of the wall, which she had intended to turn. Her heart throbbed so convulsively that she thought she must fall down dead.

"No; I can't do it!" she said to herself. And then came her own answer: "But I can—I will!"

She tried to stagger a few steps further, on to the bridge where the railings seemed to be waiting for her in malice; but her legs refused to carry her. The singing in her head rose to a roar of thunder. She stood hesitating on the dark, forsaken spot; with both hands she struggled to tear the score and crumple it into a ball, but it would not yield. Her "Song of Songs" was stronger than she was. Then, all at once, her feet began to move as if of their own accord, and took her step by step beyond the lamp-post to the railings. Yes, now the chains of the palisade were between her fingers. She could see nothing of the water below but a dark slimy shimmer. So murky was it that even the lamps were not reflected in it.

Now all she had to do was to jump—and it would be over.

" Yes, I'll do it ! I'll do it ! " a voice within her cried.

But " The Song of Songs " must go first. It would be in the way, and hinder her climbing over the railings.

She threw it. A white flash, a splash below, harsh and shrill, which made her shake in every limb, as if her face had been slapped. And when she heard it, she knew instantly that she would never do it. No, never ! Lilly Czepanek was no heroine. No martyr to her love was Lilly Czepanek. No Isolde, who finds in the will not to exist the highest form of self-existence. But she was only a poor exploited and plundered human creature who must drag on through life as best she could. She would not go back to the old round of degrading dissipations, however much Richard might look like a whipped dog. Of that she was determined ; and she began forthwith to review the few possibilities left of her earning an honest living.

Perhaps all would come right in the end, though she could not disguise the fact that she had completely lost her zeal for work, and was never likely to find it again. All she asked was to be allowed to live in peace and the exercise of virtue. Did not millions of human beings think there was nothing better ?

She cast one more searching glance at the sullenly rolling river in which " The Song of Songs " had found its grave, and then turned and walked away.

In the business circles of Berlin there was a flutter of surprise the following spring when the papers announced that Herr Richard Dehnicke, senior partner of the well-known old firm of Liebert & Dehnicke, art bronze manufacturers, had married Lilly Czepanek, a notorious beauty of the *demi-monde*. The announcement added that the pair had taken up their quarters temporarily in Southern Italy. Those who knew her were not surprised—they said that they had always felt Lilly Czepanek was a dangerous woman.

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